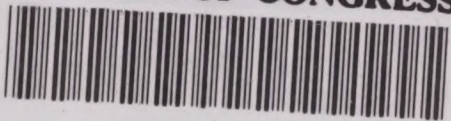


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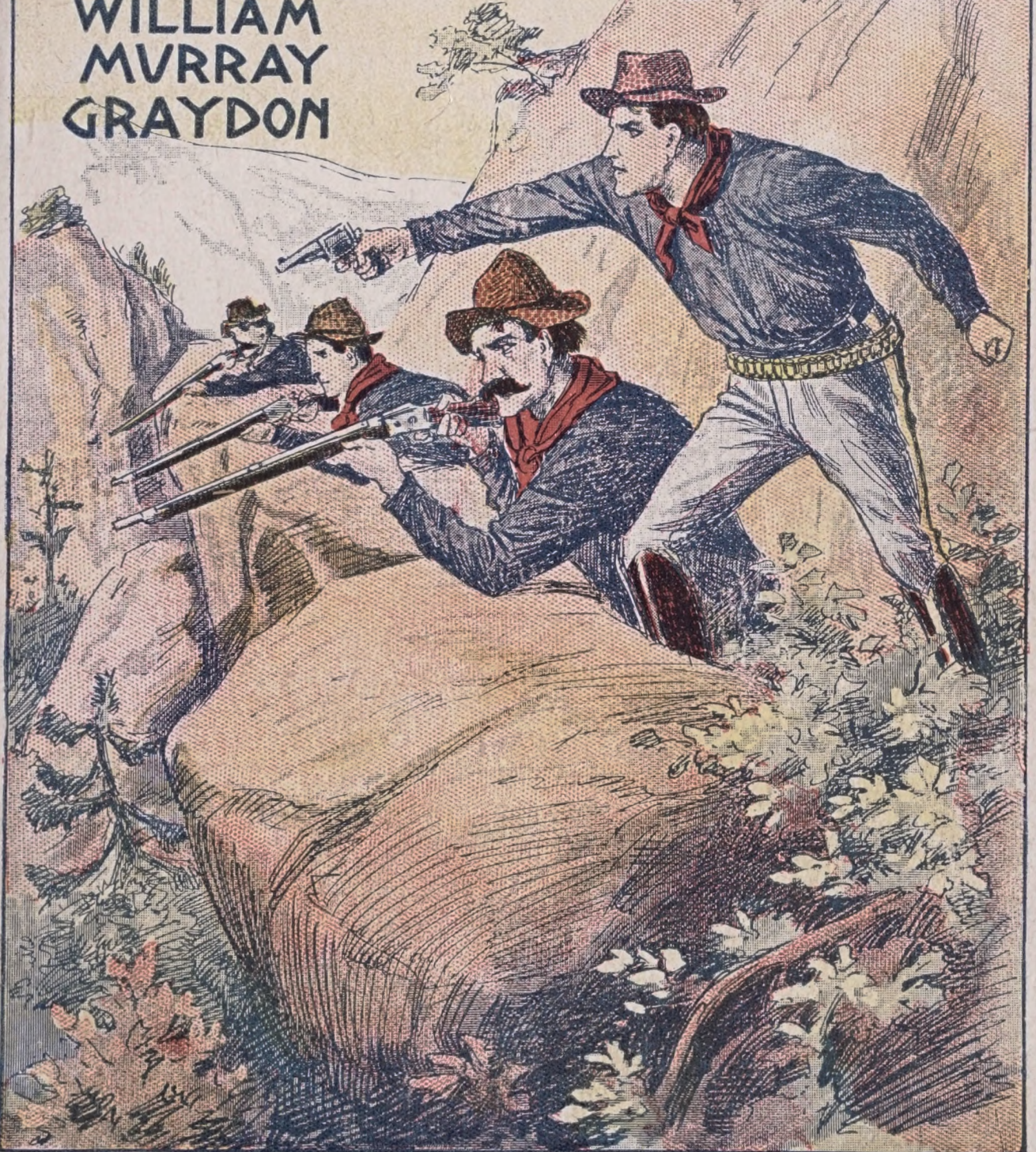
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BY
WILLIAM
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BY

WILLIAM MURRAY GRAYDON

AUTHOR OF "THE CRYPTOGRAM," "FROM LAKE TO WILDERNESS,"
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IN BARRACKS AND WIGWAM.

CHAPTER I.

SOWING THE SEEDS.

Nestled in the heart of the famous Cumberland Valley lies the old, quaint, and conservative town of Carlisle, and in all the great State of Pennsylvania one would not find a more charming place of residence. In pre-revolutionary days Carlisle was a name frequently on men's tongues, and in later years the establishment of United States barracks here gave it a military air and prestige.

At the present time the town is chiefly noted for two things—its college and its Indian school. The former is a handsome and flourishing institution, of wide renown throughout the country. The latter, occupying the old barracks on the outskirts of the town, and presided over by a Government officer and instructors, is equally well known. Here a large number of Indian boys and girls, brought from time to time from the reservations of the West, are educated and taught useful trades, with a view to fitting them for civilized life. The pupils of the school publish a little paper, and are justly proud of a fine band and a strong football team.

On a crisp Saturday afternoon in November the majority of the college students could have been found on the athletic grounds, a field of large extent which lay between the town and the Indian school. A football match played

by the teams of the two institutions had just ended, resulting in a narrowly won victory for the college. The spectators had left the ground, but the late contestants and their friends were still there, the students talking eagerly of their success and indulging in a good deal of rough horse-play, the Indian lads mingled here and there with them, and apparently taking their defeat with stolid good nature.

Destiny works in strange and unexpected ways, and at least three of those present were to look back on that afternoon as the turning-point of their lives, and the first step of a series of bitter and thrilling adventures. For two of them the outlook of the future held the rosiest of hopes and ambitions, and they looked confidently forward to careers of their own choice.

Linn Hilliard and Bruce Cameron were certainly to be envied, and they made a handsome pair as they stood surrounded by their admiring friends, the muscular frame of each set off to good advantage by his football togs.

Linn Hilliard, the captain of the team, was just entering his eighteenth year. He was tall and well-built, with a ruddy complexion, fair hair and blue eyes. His reputation and skill in athletics had not been earned at the expense of his studies, for he ranked high in the junior class of the college, and was as good at Latin and mathematics as at football and hammer-throwing.

He belonged to an old Carlisle family, and was the only child of a wealthy banker. Since the death of his wife ten years before, Mr. Hilliard had led the life of a recluse, rarely venturing into society, but deeply engrossed in his business. He was a man of few words, cold, stern, and capable of great passion when roused to anger. He had peculiar ideas as to the bringing up of children, and though he loved his son in his own way, he manifested little if any outward affection.

The banker was not a miserly man, but he limited Linn's pocket money to an amount no larger than a well-to-do mechanic would have given his son. The lad did not complain, though he found this a most inconvenient drawback at times. He knew that his father loved him at heart, and took a deep interest in his welfare and future; so he was content to rub along as best he could on his small income, the amount of which was no secret to his college friends, nor to the town people in general.

Linn had not forgotten the lessons taught him by his dead mother. He was brave, honest and truthful, hating anything low or mean, and with a rather exalted idea of schoolboy honor—which, though awkward at times, is rather to be commended than blamed. A few years before he had longed to be a soldier, but his father had reasoned him out of this. Now it was understood that he was to succeed in the banking business, and he looked forward with complacent satisfaction to the prospect. He believed his early ambition to be dead, but the spark was still there, and ready to be fanned into life should the opportunity arise.

Linn's most intimate chum was Bruce Cameron, who now stood beside him, and was equally tall and well-built. Bruce had dark eyes and hair, and a handsome, haughty face. He was a half-back on the team, and had a fair ranking in the junior class. He was the son of Captain Cameron, the principal of the Indian school, and until three years ago—he was now seventeen—he had lived in Western towns and on frontier army posts, where he had picked up a good deal of harm, and contracted a liking for dissipation and bad company.

But Bruce changed for the better after he came East, and he was now one of the brightest scholars in his class. His heart was set on a soldier's life, and his father had promised him an appointment to West Point as soon as

he graduated. This depended, however, on his general good behavior, and Bruce was trying hard to win the coveted reward. The friendship of Linn Hilliard was a great support to him, and kept him from yielding to many temptations that presented themselves. He looked up to Linn, and valued his good opinion, and the two were together so constantly that their classmates dubbed them David and Jonathan.

The third individual who is to play a part in our story was standing a short distance from Bruce and Linn, the centre of a group of friends. Deerfoot was the captain of the Government school's football team, and he was the son of the noted Sioux chieftain, Flying Thunder. He was eighteen years of age, and most superbly built. He looked more like a Hindoo prince than an American Indian, for his complexion was light, and the high cheekbones were conspicuously lacking from his features.

Deerfoot had been brought East to be educated a year before, and he had already earned a reputation for bravery, skill in athletics, and truthfulness. But he was a poor scholar, and took little interest in his new life. His face was constantly sombre and sad, and it was no secret that he bitterly hated and despised the trammels of civilization, and longed with all his heart to return to the wild, free life of the plains, and the uncouth habits of his kinsmen.

Among the shouting, rollicking groups of students was Steve Halsey, a rather flashily dressed lad of seventeen, hailing from a large Eastern city. He was the leader of the fast set of the college, and was more noted for his dissipated habits than for proficiency in studies. As a matter of fact, he was nearly at the foot of his class, and was likely to be dropped at any time.

Steve had celebrated the victory by a drink or two from a concealed pocket-flask, and his flushed face showed that

he felt the liquor. Fired by a spirit of mischief, or of braggadocio, he forced his way into the nearest group of Indians, and gave Deerfoot a rude clap on the shoulder.

"Well, we beat you, old cockalorum," he cried, "and we'll do it every time."

"Mebbe so," replied Deerfoot, drawing himself up proudly. "No can tell."

"Can't we, though?" said Steve. "I'd like to know. Look here, old man, you're not in it with us on anything. We've whitewashed you on football, and we've got men here that can clean out any of your set in racing or wrestling. Don't you believe it?"

"Mebbe," replied the young Indian, with a gleam of anger and contempt in his dark eyes. "Me willing to run with any white boy; me throw any one, too."

"Hurrah! do you hear that, fellows?" shouted Steve, tossing his cap in the air. "Deerfoot challenges you all to a racing and wrestling match."

In a moment a hundred students had swarmed forward and surrounded the group, and Linn Hilliard was loudly urged to take up the challenge at once.

"Let's have it right off," cried one. "Win more laurels for the college, old fellow."

"Go it, Linn," yelled another. "You can beat him."

"If Linn beats him running I'll down him in a wrestling match," Bruce Cameron cried, boastfully.

Linn was quite helpless in the matter. He disliked the idea of being dragged into the race by Steve Halsey, whom he heartily despised; and, moreover, he felt that he was no match in speed for Deerfoot. But his companions allowed him no choice, and the contestants were shortly drawn up side by side just within the main gate of the grounds. It was agreed that the race should be clear around the field, from corner to corner, finishing up

at the starting point. This made a course of very nearly a mile.

At the word "go" Linn and Deerfoot were off, watched by every eye. On and on they sped, now one in the lead, now the other. When they rounded the last corner Linn was several yards ahead, and now the excitement was intense.

But Deerfoot was holding his best effort in reserve, and at the last minute he made a spurt that brought him abreast of his competitor. Linn strained every nerve, but in vain. Amid silence from the students, and loud applause from his own friends, the young Indian shot by the goal, a winner by a good three feet.

"Fairly won, Deerfoot," exclaimed Linn, holding out a hand to his rival. "It was not to be expected that I could beat a chap like you, fresh from the plains. You deserve your name."

"You run well," replied the Indian, taking the proffered hand, and smiling faintly with pride. "Some other time you beat, mebbe."

A little later, when the runners had recovered breath, Bruce came forward. He was an adept at wrestling, and had mastered many of its skilled points. Heretofore none had thrown him, and he confidently hoped to retrieve Linn's defeat by downing the Indian.

"It's my turn now, Deerfoot," he exclaimed, "if you're rested enough."

"Me ready," replied the Indian, stalking forward into the space that the students had already cleared.

"Look here, Bruce, I wouldn't go on with this," Linn whispered to his friend. "It's not too late to get out of it. He'll throw you as sure as fate."

"Let him alone, Linn Hilliard," sneered Steve Halsey, who had overheard in part.

A clamor rose from the students, and Linn reluctantly withdrew.

"It's all right, old fellow," Bruce called after him. "Just watch me win."

A moment later the two had grappled, and amid breathless silence the match went on. From the first it was a close struggle. To and fro they swayed and slid, bending this way and that. Each displayed cunning and skill, and after three or four minutes the end was not in sight.

But suddenly Deerfoot made a rapid and almost imperceptible movement of one knee, and that quickly stretched his opponent flat on his back. The loud applause of the Indians and jeering laughter from some of Steve Halsey's boon companions, stung Bruce's fiery temper to madness.

"A foul! a foul!" he cried, scrambling to his feet. "I wasn't thrown fair, and you know it, you tricky redskin."

"White boy lie," declared Deerfoot, his eyes flashing dangerously.

"Do I?" snarled Bruce. "Take that, you copper-faced cheat——"

But before Bruce could deliver the blow, already aimed with full force, Linn sprang forward and pinned his arms fast.

"For shame!" he whispered.

At the same instant half a dozen of the Indian lads surrounded Deerfoot and attempted to carry him away.

"Let me go," cried Bruce, struggling hard. "Let me get at him. He threw me foul, and called me a liar."

"Calm yourself, old fellow," replied Linn. "Don't give way to passion like this. You're in the wrong, too. It was a fair throw, and a mighty clever one. You owe Deerfoot an apology, and you'll tell him so, won't you?"

"No, I won't," muttered Bruce. "I didn't expect this of you, Linn."

"Make the meddler let go, Bruce," shouted Steve Halsey. "It's none of his business."

Linn faced around angrily, still keeping hold of his friend, and there seemed a fair prospect of a general row. But the wiser students interfered, and after a little more excitement the affair was settled by an almost unanimous verdict in favor of the Indian.

Deerfoot threw a grateful and friendly glance at Linn as he was led away by his companions. Bruce sullenly left the field with Steve Halsey's crowd, and Linn followed with the others, thinking sadly of the quarrel with his best friend, and yet satisfied that he had done no more than was right.

Thus were sown, on that October afternoon, the seeds of a strange and plentiful crop—a crop of heartaches and sorrows, disgrace and dishonor, friendships and enmities, adventures and sufferings. And it all sprang from a thoughtless word, and a fearless defense of justice and honor.

CHAPTER II.

LINN'S ERRAND TO THE INDIAN SCHOOL.

The unfortunate quarrel between Linn and Bruce was not healed up, so far as putting the lads on their former intimate terms was concerned. Bruce made a feeble effort at reconciliation, admitting himself to have been in the wrong, and Linn was only too glad to meet him half way. But things were never the same after that, and a wider estrangement—which Linn did his best to prevent—grew between the two friends.

Steve Halsey, who had always disliked Linn and recognized a kindred spirit in Bruce, was mainly to blame for the coolness. He played his cards well and cunningly, and as a result Bruce was gradually drawn into the fast set of the college, and his old appetite for dissipation and bad habits got a strong hold on him again.

Captain Cameron knew nothing of this, for he was a very busy man and had time to think of nothing else but the management of the Indian school. It was well known in the college, however, that Bruce was dropping lower in his class, and that he spent his evenings with Steve Halsey's set, playing billiards and pool, drinking and gambling in one or another of his new companion's rooms, or prowling about the town in search of mischief at late hours.

Linn remonstrated with him from time to time, but his influence now was of no avail, and he almost lost hope of reclaiming his friend. He could rarely find a chance to talk to Bruce alone, for Steve Halsey stuck to him

like a shadow. His affection for his estranged chum was sincere, and he was more than once on the point of appealing to Captain Cameron, whose ignorance he was aware of, and who, he knew, would speedily bring about a change for the better. But his sense of honor kept him from taking this step—a step which was sure to be misunderstood, and sure to bring him into unmerited disgrace with his fellow students.

Strangely enough, during the months that followed the football game, Deerfoot entered on friendly relations with both lads. Bruce was a good hater, and slow to forgive either a real or fancied grievance. It was rather remarkable, therefore, that he should of his own accord have apologized to the young Indian, and expressed a wish that the past should be forgotten.

Possibly the fact that Bruce lived at the school, and could not have kept up the enmity without discovery, had a great deal to do with the matter. At all events, Deerfoot's truthful nature suspected neither this motive, nor a deeper one, and he readily consented to be reconciled.

The friendship between the young Sioux and Linn had a firmer foundation, springing from the latter's magnanimous conduct when he was beaten in the race, and from his fearless championship of the Indian's cause. They did not see each other very often, nor had they much to say when they did meet, but it was tacitly understood that they were firm friends.

Sometimes they went tramping together of an afternoon, and when they were alone in the woods and fields Deerfoot would talk more freely, and tell of his wild and happy life in the West. Linn gathered from the conversation that the Indian was intensely dissatisfied, and longed for his former life. Linn could understand this feeling, and sympathize with it; but nevertheless he tried to reconcile the young Sioux to his surroundings and to

instill a desire to become a useful and civilized citizen of the United States. But he could not flatter himself that he succeeded. Deerfoot avoided the subject with evident aversion, and as the weeks passed on he grew more sad and melancholy.

One afternoon in May, six months after the events on the athletic ground, Linn went from the college recitation room to his father's bank. It was four o'clock, and the bank had been closed to the public for an hour. A couple of clerks were bending over ledgers, and Mr. Hilliard sat at a desk in his private room. He held a letter in his hand, and a stack of bank-notes lay before him. He wheeled around in his chair as his son entered.

"Father, I would like to have twenty-five dollars," said Linn, abruptly.

"Twenty-five dollars?" exclaimed the banker. "Nonsense! What can you want with such a sum of money, Linn?"

Linn's heart sank, and he did not reply. The truth of the matter was that a needy friend had begged him for the loan of that amount for a few days, and he had made a half promise to get it, though with little hope of success.

"Are you in debt?" the banker went on. "I can't believe that you would dare to disobey me. You remember what I told you some time ago——"

"I don't owe a penny," Linn interrupted. "It is not that. But I want the money very badly, father."

"Yes, to squander on foolishness," said Mr. Hilliard. "I certainly don't intend to give you twenty-five dollars. Money is the root of all evil, and in the hands of a lad of your age it becomes a most pernicious factor. You have no idea of its use."

"I never had a chance to learn," Linn replied, a little

bitterly. "But this is not for foolishness, father. I want the money for a particular purpose, and if you insist——"

"You can't have it," Mr. Hilliard said, sternly, "and there is an end of the matter. Don't sit down; I am going to send you on an errand. The book-keepers have not finished, and can't be spared from their desks.

"Captain Cameron has been summoned by telegram to Washington on urgent business," he added, glancing at the open letter. "He must leave by an early train in the morning, and as he may be ordered straight to the West, he needs five hundred dollars. He incloses his check for the amount, and asks that I send him the money at once by a trusty messenger, as he is too busy to come for it himself."

Mr. Hilliard counted over the bank-notes, put them in a long envelope, sealed it, and gave the package to Linn.

"Take this to Captain Cameron," he said, "and have him examine it in your presence. Then come straight home to supper."

A moment later Linn was out in the street, and walking rapidly toward the Indian school. He felt sore and hurt at his father's refusal to give him the twenty-five dollars he had asked for, and he dreaded meeting the friend whom he desired to assist.

"Father treats me like a baby," he reflected, "but I suppose he means it all for the best. I won't ask for the money again, and I don't believe it would do any good if I did. I'm sorry for Tom Owner. He's a good fellow, and it was hard luck that he should break old Meadow's plate-glass window. Still, he needn't have played ball in the street."

Linn soon reached the Indian school, and rang the bell of Captain Cameron's handsome house, which stood just inside the grounds, and in close proximity to the barracks. A servant led him to a room on the second floor, a cozy

apartment containing easy-chairs, book-cases, and a heavy mahogany secretary. It adjoined the captain's bed-chamber, and two windows, partly shaded by stout vines that had grown up from the ground, looked out on the side of the house.

The captain made his appearance from the front room, where his wife had been helping him to pack his trunk.

"Glad to see you, Linn," he said, cordially. "I suppose your father sent you with the money. I was sorry to trouble him."

"Here it is, sir," replied Linn, "and it was no trouble at all. Father says will you please count it."

Captain Cameron took the envelope, opened the secretary, and sat down. He counted the bank-notes with great care, and then thrust them loosely into a pigeon-hole. Linn stood beside him, glancing curiously around the room, and twice he saw Bruce go by the hall door and look quickly in. The second time he nodded at Linn, and then passed down the stairs.

"The money is all right," said the captain, as he rose to his feet, and closed and locked the secretary. "Tell your father that I am indebted to him for his promptness and kindness. But won't you stay for supper? Bruce is about somewhere, and will be glad to see you."

"I'm afraid I must go right home," replied Linn.

"Well, come again. Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, Captain Cameron," said Linn.

He looked for Bruce as he went downstairs and out of the house, hoping to get a few words with him. But that young gentleman was nowhere to be seen, and Linn went on home, little dreaming of what was to result from his errand to the barracks.

CHAPTER III.

THE DISCOVERY OF A PLOT.

Mr. Hilliard's residence was at some distance from the bank. The house was inclosed by shrubbery and a terraced lawn, and fronted on a quiet street that led from the college to the Indian school.

Supper that night was a more dull and gloomy ceremony than usual, for father and son had little to say to each other. Linn still resented the denial of his request, and the banker busied himself between courses with the evening paper.

From the table Linn went to his own room, and studied hard for three or four hours. About ten o'clock—which was a late hour for Carlisle—he put up his books, took his hat, and left the house by a side door, locking it after him and slipping the key into his pocket. This was his frequent custom when he had wearied his brain over lessons, and he always found that he could go to sleep quickly after a short stroll in the night air.

He wandered down the quaint old street, the footways of which were paved with flagstones and shaded by close rows of lofty elm trees. No one else was astir, and few lights were to be seen in the houses. When he had reached the outskirts of the town, and was midway between the college and Indian school, Linn turned to retrace his steps.

Just then, happening to glance across the street, he saw two lads pass under the feeble light of a lamp-post, and stealthily vanish in the deep shadow of the trees.

The two were Bruce Cameron and Steve Halsey—as Linn discovered at once—and they were headed toward the Indian school.

“What can they be up to?” Linn muttered. “Some mischief, I’ll bet anything. Just one scrape, if he is caught at it, will settle Bruce. I have half a mind to——”

On the spur of the moment he struck diagonally across the street, and gained the opposite pavement, at a spot where the shadows were deep, barely in time to head the boys off.

“Hallo, Bruce,” he whispered. “I thought that was you.”

Steve dodged quickly toward a tree, evidently scared by the unexpected encounter, but Bruce held his ground.

“What are you doing here, Linn Hilliard?” he demanded, sullenly.

“Just taking a little walk before going to bed,” Linn answered. “I want to talk to you a minute, if you don’t mind.”

He made a gesture to Bruce, and the latter accompanied him a few yards down the street, leaving Steve standing alongside the tree.

“I hope you won’t be angry,” Linn began, “for what I am going to say is for the sake of old friendship.”

“I don’t know why you need say anything,” muttered Bruce. “I can take care of myself.”

“You haven’t been doing it very well lately,” replied Linn, “if all that I hear is true. And you and Steve have surely got some mischief on hand for to-night.”

“No, we haven’t,” declared Bruce. “What makes you think that? Steve is only walking part of the way home with me.”

Linn was not convinced, for he knew by his uneasy manner and by the tone in which he spoke that Bruce was telling an untruth.

"I don't suppose my talking will do any good," he replied, sadly, "though it was different at one time. It is not my fault that we have become estranged, Bruce. I feel just as friendly toward you as ever——"

"And so do I toward you," interrupted Bruce, in a petulant tone. "But a fellow has got to have some fun once in a while, and if you're not in for anything of that sort you can't blame me for taking up with fellows that are."

"Fun?" said Linn, scornfully. "It's mighty poor fun if you measure it by results. Can't you see what you are drifting to, Bruce? If you keep this up, you will drop into a lower class, or be expelled from college. And then good-bye to West Point! You know what your father will do if he finds that you have fallen into the old habits you learned out West. You told me yourself that he would make you enlist in the army, and serve as a common soldier for three years."

"There's no danger," said Bruce. "I'm not so very far down in the class, and I'm cramming hard now for the examinations. I'll pull through all right. And as for bad habits—why, what little sport I have is nothing compared to what it was out in those Western towns. Wait till you've seen a little real life, Linn——"

"I don't want to see that kind," exclaimed Linn. "There is danger, Bruce, and you are either willfully running into it, or you are too blind to see it. You can't continue safely in these courses much longer."

"For the sake of our old friendship, Bruce," he went on, earnestly, "drop Steve Halsey and his set, give up your rollicking and dissipation, and stick to your studies like a man. Let us be the chums that we once were. Graduation is only a year from now, and you will be well rewarded by a cadetship to West Point. Do listen to me, Bruce. I mean it fairly, and I can't bear to see you going

astray, dragged down by fellows like Steve Halsey and his crowd. Shake on it, old chap, do."

Bruce hesitated, but made no effort to accept the proffered hand. Before he could reply Steve approached half way from the tree, and gave an impatient whistle.

"How much longer are you going to keep me waiting while you talk to that old stick?" he called, in a low tone. "If you don't come right off I'm going home. I didn't bargain for this when I promised to walk part way with you."

"I'm coming now, Steve," Bruce replied. "Don't be angry, Linn," he added, in a whisper. "I'll think over what you've said and let you know about it. Good-night."

With this Bruce hurried away, and he and Steve vanished down the dark street. Linn stood still for a moment, sorely grieved and perplexed in mind, and hesitating between two courses.

"It seems a hopeless case," he reflected. "My influence counts for nothing with Bruce. What shall I do, go home or follow them? They have some deep-laid plan on foot for to-night—I am confident of that more than ever now. But it seems like a mean and underhand trick to dog their steps. Still, it would be no more than a friendly act. If I can save Bruce from a scrape I'm going to do it, cost what it may. So there."

Having resolved on this step. Linn was quick and cunning to act. He slipped down a side street, and, on a steady trot, made a detour that finally brought him to the angle of the Indian school nearest the town. Here, in the shadow of a tree across the road, he crouched down to wait and watch.

The school buildings and grounds were surrounded by a high board fence with spikes on top, and at night the main gate—which was some distance from where Linn

lay hidden—was guarded by a watchman. The interior of the grounds was also patrolled at intervals, and yet in spite of these precautions it was a frequent occurrence for one or more of the Indian pupils to make their escape, in the hope of ultimately returning to their far Western homes.

Linn's vigil did not last long. In a short time Bruce and Steve appeared, walking softly and warily. To the amazement of the concealed lad they went straight to the corner of the fence, swung aside a board that had been pried loose at the bottom, and vanished within the grounds.

Linn hesitated briefly. Then he stole out from cover, easily found the sliding board, and crept cautiously through the gap. He threw himself flat on the inner side, and lifted his head to reconnoiter.

This portion of the grounds was intersected by tar walks and dotted with thick clumps of shrubbery. Several hundred feet away was Captain Cameron's residence, quite in darkness except for the library. The window of this apartment was raised, and against the lowered blind a black shadow—evidently that of the captain himself—could be seen flitting to and fro.

Bruce and Steve had disappeared, and after waiting in vain for sight or sound of them, and puzzling himself to account for their strange actions, Linn decided to venture farther.

On hands and knees he crawled warily forward, keeping entirely in the grass, and under the shelter of the overhanging bushes. In this fashion he silently advanced to within a hundred feet of the house. Then, suddenly hearing whispered voices, he crouched down on his stomach like a serpent.

The speakers were Bruce and Steve, and they seemed

to be lying under the spreading branches of a small pine tree about ten feet ahead.

"Yes, it's easily done," Steve was saying, "and we'll manage the rest all right. Things couldn't have turned out better. You have the chisel?"

"Yes, it's in my pocket," Bruce answered. "One twist will do it, and without much noise. Then the rest won't be hard. All you need do is lie shady here, and keep out of the watchman's way."

"And in the morning they will think he used the window," said Steve. "By that time he will be far away, and if he's as sharp as I take him to be he won't be found. It was lucky he confided in you, and got you to help him to escape."

"It will all work like a charm," whispered Bruce. "We're safe for dead sure if they don't catch him, and even if they bring him back, and find that on him, he won't betray us."

"That's so," assented Steve. "We're fixed both ways. He's the sort of an Indian that will die before he breaks a promise, and they'll never make him tell where he got it. He'll simply refuse to say anything, and that's all we want."

Here the conversation dropped to a lower tone, and after some further whispering, the import of which the listener could not catch, the young conspirators were heard moving off to the left through the bushes.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish," thought Linn. "It's all clear as daylight now. These foolish chaps, out of a mere spirit of adventure, are going to help one of the Indian pupils to escape. They intend to force open the door of the quarters and smuggle him out of the grounds. And I'll bet Deerfoot is the one."

Linn's conclusion, though there was some coloring to warrant it, was hasty and ill-formed, in view of all that

the conspirators had said. But he was not in a frame of mind to dissect and inquire into the meaning of every sentence that he had overheard, and he did not dream that the plot had a far deeper motive than the escape of the Indian lad.

"Now, what am I going to do?" he said to himself, as he crouched low in the darkness. "Was ever a fellow in such a quandary? I can't give the thing away or frustrate the plot without getting Bruce and Steve into serious trouble. I can't honorably do that, of course.

"And there's Deerfoot! I like the fellow, and pity him, and although it's wrong for him to run away—and about as good as useless—I'm not going to be the one to betray him, and get him punished. How could I ever face him again, after we've been such friends? I wish I had let these fellows alone. I've made a bad break to-night, and the only way out of it is to slide home as quickly as possible, and keep dark about what I know."

This determination by no means solved the problem, but it was the only thing that Linn could see to do. His sense of honor, as exists to an almost visionary degree among schoolboys of the better sort, told him that his hands were tied. And whether our young hero was right or not must be left to the reader to decide.

So Linn turned about, and crawled slowly back as he had come. Arriving half way to the fence, he ventured to rise to his feet, and he had taken but two steps when a strong hand fastened from behind on his collar.

CHAPTER IV.

STARTLING NEWS.

"Hanged if it ain't Linn Hilliard!" cried a gruff and familiar voice. "Bless me, I'd never have believed it."

Linn twisted around in his captor's grasp, and recognized a watchman with whom he was on friendly terms.

"Let me go, Sanders," he whispered. "Do; that's a good fellow. I'm not up to any harm."

"I an't sure of that," replied Sanders. "No; I can't let you go, Linn—it's against orders. And yonder is the captain now."

Sure enough, the door of the house had suddenly opened, casting a flood of light onto the porch, and revealing the stalwart figure of Captain Cameron. His keen ears must have at once detected the watchman's rather highly pitched voice.

"Is that you, Sanders?" he called sharply. "What is the matter? Anything wrong?"

"Coming, sir," Sanders answered. "There is no help for it, my boy," he added, in a whisper to Linn. "You have got to face the music."

Linn felt himself to be in a tight place, and he had no idea how he was going to get out of the scrape. But he stoutly resolved not to clear himself by betraying the conspirators, and with as much nerve and self-possession as he could summon, he suffered the watchman to lead him to the porch, and into the glare of light that shone from the hall.

With an exclamation of surprise, Captain Cameron glanced at the captive.

"It is Linn Hilliard," he said, not unkindly. "There is surely some mistake about this, Sanders. I daresay it can be readily explained. What are you doing in the grounds at this time of night, my boy? How did you get in?"

"I can't tell you, sir," Linn answered.

"You can't tell me?" exclaimed the captain. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have reasons for refusing to answer your questions, Captain Cameron—good and honorable reasons. I beg you to believe that I came here for no wrongful purpose."

"Then you cannot persist in keeping silence," said the captain. "Come, my boy, let me hear your story."

Linn shook his head and said nothing.

"You are acting very unwisely," said the captain. "If you came here with no wrongful intent yourself perhaps you are screening some one else. Is that so?"

To this abrupt question Linn gave neither denial nor assent, and after waiting in silence for a moment a sudden thought occurred to Captain Cameron, and he stepped inside the hall.

"Bruce, Bruce," he called loudly up the stairs. "Are you there?"

The summons was twice repeated, and then a door was heard to open on the second floor, and Bruce's drowsy voice answered:

"I'm in bed, father. Do you want me?"

"No, it's all right," replied the captain, in a tone of relief; and as the door closed he stepped out to the porch again.

He glanced sternly at Linn, and then turned to the watchman.

"Let me hear your story," he demanded. "Where did you find the lad?"

"When I first seen him, sir," replied Sanders, "he was creeping along on his hands and knees half way between here and the east fence. Then he jumped up, intending to bolt for the fence, and that quickly I grabbed him."

"Do you know how he got into the grounds?"

"I can't tell you that, sir," stated Sanders, "but I'm sure he didn't come in by the gate. Martin is on guard there, and he hasn't opened it since sundown."

"Then he no doubt scaled the fence," suggested Captain Cameron. "Make an examination in the morning, Sanders, and report to me if you find any of the spikes off."

Turning to Linn, the captain added:

"I shall give you another chance to confess, my boy. This is a serious matter, remember, and may lead to very ugly consequences. Consider well before you answer."

"I have considered, sir," said Linn, pleadingly. "I am very sorry, but I can't tell you anything. I can only repeat that I came here for no bad purpose."

"And this is your last word?"

"My last, sir," Linn replied, firmly.

Captain Cameron looked keenly and thoughtfully at the lad for a moment.

"I regret this occurrence exceedingly," he said, coldly, "and I feel it my duty to speak to your father. I shall probably see him to-morrow morning, as I have postponed my journey until an afternoon train. You may go home now. Sanders will see you outside of the grounds."

"And then shall I look round a bit more, sir?" asked the watchman, "in case any one else should be lurking about——"

"I don't think that will be necessary," interrupted the

captain, "but suppose you keep a closer watch than usual on the quarters—until you go off duty at three o'clock."

With this Captain Cameron entered the house and closed the door, while Linn was conducted to the gate in grim silence, and landed outside the grounds.

The lad's pent-up feelings burst forth as he walked rapidly homeward through the cool night. He was angry at himself, at Captain Cameron, and most of all at Bruce and Steve. He also felt considerably worried.

"A nice scrape I'm in!" he muttered half aloud. "This is what I get for trying to do those reckless fellows a good turn, and screening them from exposure. I've lost Captain Cameron's good opinion, and I don't see any chance of getting it back again. There will be a stormy time when he tells my father. I suppose I'll have to face the music as I did this evening, and refuse to say anything.

"I've accomplished one thing, though. Bruce and Steve won't dream of carrying out their plot now, and they'll likely abandon it altogether. When I was caught Bruce must have slipped into the house by a side door and gone to bed. And I'll bet anything Steve was hiding in the bushes close enough to hear all that was said on the porch. He may be there yet, but it's most likely he slipped out of the grounds ahead of me and hurried back to the college.

"I hope he did hear everything, and will tell Bruce. Anyway, Bruce will get the story from his father, and if there's any good left in him—and I'm sure there is—he will make up with me and drop Steve and his set. So, after all, my night's adventure may turn out for the best."

The above reflections put Linn into a more easy frame of mind by the time he reached the town. He slipped into the house, mounted noiselessly to his own room, and was

asleep almost as soon as his head pressed the pillow. And whatever dreams visited him in slumber, assuredly none forecast the terrible results of the night's events—the tragedy that was to blacken his young life on the morrow.

The next day was Saturday, and when Linn got awake his first thought was that he was free from studies and recitations. Then he remembered the experience of the night before, and he felt uncomfortable at the prospect of the promised interview between his father and Captain Cameron.

He had slept two hours beyond his usual time, for the bronze clock on the mantel pointed to half-past nine. He dressed quickly and went down stairs. His father had gone to the bank, of course, and he did not enjoy his breakfast any the less because it was eaten in solitude.

At a few minutes past ten o'clock Linn left the house, and walked rapidly toward the bank. He supposed that Captain Cameron had called on his father by this time, and he was resolved to face the music at once, and thus end his worry and uncertainty in one way or another.

The banker was seated at his desk, which was strewn with the morning's opened letters, and when the lad entered he looked up with a grave and stern expression.

"I knew it," thought Linn. "Now for the storm."

But his father's first words dispelled the conviction.

"What is it, my son?" he said, hurriedly. "I am very busy this morning. I can't be disturbed."

"Why, I thought—oh, nothing, particular, sir," stammered Linn. "I just dropped in. I—I thought perhaps you might want me."

With a gesture of impatience, Mr. Hilliard turned to his correspondence; then he changed his mind as quickly, and wheeled around in his chair.

"I have a piece of news for you," he said, "but you

had better not let it go any farther at present. Captain Cameron's wife was here in her carriage a few moments ago to draw some more money. The five hundred dollars I sent him last evening was stolen in the night."

"Stolen?" gasped Linn, his face turning all colors.

He dropped limply into a chair.

"Yes, stolen," said the banker, regarding his son curiously. "Every dollar of it. The money was in an old-fashioned secretary, and the lid was forced open with a chisel from one of the Indian work-rooms."

"Who—who took it?" Linn asked, hoarsely. "Do they know?"

"Your friend, Deerfoot, was the thief," replied the banker. "He must have climbed up to the window by the vines. He was captured at an early hour this morning while trying to escape, but only twenty-five dollars was found on him. He denies the robbery, and insists that the money was given to him. No doubt the young ruffian has artfully concealed the balance of the notes."

"I'll never believe that of Deerfoot," exclaimed Linn, thrown off his guard by indignation and by his sudden realization of the infamous plot. "Never! There is surely some one else mixed up in the crime."

"Very likely," assented the banker. "Indeed, Mrs. Cameron intimated that the Indian was suspected to have a confederate. I can't understand her actions. She behaved queerly, very queerly, as though she had some secret on her mind. The captain will not leave for Washington until to-morrow, and he sent word that he would call on me this afternoon. That is enough now. I am too busy to answer any more questions. Oh, here is a letter that came for you this morning. Rather an illiterate correspondent, I should judge."

He turned to his desk, after handing Linn an envelope

on which his name and address were inscribed in printed and illy spelled characters.

With a careless glance the lad thrust the missive into his pocket and left the bank, his face flushed and excited. He went straight home, locked himself in his room, and sat down to consider the terrible and perplexing situation in which he found himself.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEARCH FOR THE CULPRITS.

It needed but brief consideration to make clear to Linn the meaning of all that he had overheard on the previous night. Each well remembered sentence stood out in a new and significant guise, and in the light of the morning's events the whole treacherous and criminal plot was revealed beyond a shadow of doubt.

"Yes, I see it all," exclaimed the heartsick lad, beginning to pace the floor in his anger and excitement. "Steve Halsey is most to blame. Of his own accord Bruce could never have stooped to so mean and dastardly an act. And it happened just in this way. Deerfoot resolved to escape, and on account of the precautions that have been taken lately, he found it necessary to confide in some one, and get assistance. He knew that it must be either Bruce or myself, for we have both been friendly with him of late. So he chose Bruce, because I have always tried to persuade him to be contented, and to put up with his lot.

"No doubt he and Bruce had a talk over the matter some time yesterday, and in the afternoon Bruce saw his father lock the five hundred dollars in the secretary. Then he goes off and tells Steve, and the two of them, tempted by so large a sum of money, hatch out the plot to steal it; and in such a way that Deerfoot will get the blame. They counted on the Indian escaping entirely, but they took good care to secure themselves in case he should be captured—which is just what has happened.

"I can imagine how the plot was carried out. I can

see it all as plainly as though I had been there. After I left the grounds last night Steve stayed there, hidden in the bushes. Then, when his father was sound asleep and all was quiet, Bruce noiselessly broke open the secretary with the chisel he had stolen from the work-rooms, took the money, and slipped out of the house to join Steve. No doubt Steve left the grounds, and hurried home with the four hundred and seventy-five dollars. By this time Deerfoot had likely escaped from the sleeping quarters, and he met Bruce by appointment in some lonely spot amid the shrubbery. Bruce gave him the twenty-five dollars, and made him promise never to tell where he got it, or who helped him to escape. Then Bruce crept back to bed, and a little later Deerfoot was nabbed by Sanders while trying to get over the fence."

With a groan of despair, Linn dropped down on the bed and covered his face with his hands.

"And now what am I going to do about it?" he went on, half aloud. "Steve has the stolen money hidden away, and he and Bruce think themselves perfectly secure. And they have every reason to think so. I know Deerfoot well enough for that. Though part of the stolen money has been found on him, and the evidence all shows that he climbed up by the vines to Captain Cameron's room, his dogged Indian sense of honor and truth will prove his ruin. He has promised to be silent, and he won't say a word to clear himself, or to shift the crime on Bruce and Steve. A team of wild horses wouldn't be able to drag anything out of him. What am I going to do?"

For some minutes Linn sat on the bed, pondering and puzzling over the situation. His mind was so full of pity and sympathy for Deerfoot, and of hot indignation against Bruce and Steve, that he quite overlooked a matter of vital importance to himself.

It never entered his head that strong circumstantial

evidence existed to connect him with the robbery—to put him under suspicion of being Deerfoot's confederate. He did not stop to reflect on the cause of Mrs. Cameron's strange actions in the banker's office that morning, or to conjecture why Captain Cameron intended to call on his father in the afternoon.

When the clock on the mantel pealed the hour of noon in silvery tones, Linn's look of hesitation and perplexity suddenly vanished. He rose to his feet and put on his cap.

"I don't know how this thing is going to end," he said to himself, "and I can't see much chance for those reckless fellows to escape detection and punishment. But one thing is certain, Deerfoot sha'n't suffer for a crime he never committed. I'm going to hunt up Bruce and Steve now, and tell them all I know. And what I do after that will depend on themselves. Either they must make a clean breast of it, or I will."

Linn was about to leave the room when he remembered the queer letter his father had handed him. He sat down again and opened the envelope. Inside was a bit of paper on which was drawn, with rude skill, a very odd-looking sketch.

A mass of rocks with a black hole at the base seemed about to topple into a pool of water. Over the top of the rocks peeped an exaggerated sun, with rays flashing at all angles. At one corner of the chart "Deerfoot" was printed in scrawling letters.

The paper contained no more than this, but its hidden meaning was apparent to Linn at almost the first glance.

"Here's a queer go!" he muttered. "Poor Deerfoot! he intended to make for Alexander's cave after his escape and hide there until the pursuit had blown over. According to this, he expected me to meet him there at sunrise—no, it must be sunset, and it means to-night. I sup-

pose he wanted to say good-by, knowing that I wouldn't urge him to go back after he was once free. Or perhaps he wanted me to help him in some way! Well, it don't matter one way or another now. The poor fellow is a tight prisoner, and won't be likely to keep his engagement."

Linn carelessly stuffed the chart and envelope into his pocket, and left the house. He went straight toward the college, half expecting to find Bruce and Steve in the latter's room.

The town wore its usual quiet and peaceful aspect, which was certain evidence that the robbery at the Indian school had not yet been made public. The college campus was filled with students lounging and chatting under the shade of the great trees, and at the street gate Linn met a lad who roomed next to Steve.

"Hallo, Jack!" he said. "Seen anything of Halsey this morning? Is he in his room?"

"No," was the reply. "Cameron came for him two hours ago, and they went away together. Steve had his fishing-rod and a lunch basket. You'll likely find them at the creek."

"Thanks," said Linn, briefly, and without more words he circled around the corner of the campus, and soon found himself in the open country.

"They've gone to the dam," he reflected, as he took a short cut through fields and woods, "for Steve keeps a boat out there. But the fishing is all a bluff. They want a chance to talk things over in quiet, and as likely as not they've got the stolen money with them in the lunch basket. I'd like to see where they hide it—for that's what they're sure to do."

The dam referred to, which supplied the town with water, was on the Conodoguinet Creek, and lay rather more than a mile to the westward of Carlisle. And half

a mile down the lonely and wooded reaches of the creek, in a great cliff that towered sheerly aloft from almost the water's edge, was Alexander's Cave; where Deerfoot had hoped to hide for a time, and where he had sent word to his friend Linn to meet him.

The cave was an ancient place, weird and uncanny of reputation, and seldom visited by even the most venturesome of people. It had a broad, high entrance, which continued inward for a hundred feet or more, and then terminated in a narrow hole at the top of a steep ledge of rocks.

From here a multiplicity of passages, wound and entangled with one another, were said to lead in numerous directions, none having an exit to the outer air, and all terminating hopelessly in the bowels of the earth.

There was a well-founded story to the effect that years ago, when Carlisle was an army post, a soldier and his dog had entered Alexander's Cave to explore it. A week later the dog turned up at the garrison, worn to a skeleton, and with his hide scraped and torn by squirming through sharp stones. But the soldier was never found nor heard of again; nor could any one discover the exit by which the animal had escaped from underground.

Naturally, this story—which was fully credited—prevented any further or complete explorations of the cave. The college students frequently went in for a short distance, and twice Linn and Deerfoot had penetrated to the first turn beyond the ledge. The young Sioux had known something of caves in the West, and he had more than once boasted his willingness to go through this one from end to end.

It was early in the afternoon when Linn reached the water-works' dam. An old man was fishing from a rock on the opposite side of the creek, but there was no sign of Bruce and Steve. That they had been here was certain,

however. Steve's boat, which he kept in an eddy a short distance below the overshoot, was missing.

"I'll find them somewhere down stream," Linn concluded, "and I hope it will be on this side. If they've landed on the other shore I'll have to go a mile below to the bridge—unless I can run across a boat."

Slowly and warily the lad tramped down the bank of the creek, keeping under the trees and bushes, and watching on all sides and ahead.

Nearly half a mile below the dam he came to where a tiny stream trickled through a densely wooded ravine into the creek. Just across the ravine towered a rocky hill, and here began the narrow path that led, between the water's edge and the base of the cliff, to the mouth of Alexander's Cave. It was a lonely spot, and one rarely visited.

Linn paused, listened, and crept closer to the bank of the creek. He suddenly caught sight of the missing boat pulled far up into the shaded channel of the rivulet, and at the same instant he detected low voices near by.

With a fast-beating heart he stepped across the stream and cautiously parted a fringe of bushes on the opposite bank. His search was ended at last.

In a shady nook under the trees, with a flat stone between them, sat Steve and Bruce.

They were smoking short pipes, and each held a handful of cards. On the surface of the rock were more cards, a heap of silver coins, and two glasses of wine. From the open lunch basket, which stood near by, protruded a green bottle and a parcel of sandwiches.

CHAPTER VI.

A FALSE ACCUSATION.

Linn hesitated but a moment. Having taken in the scene at a brief glance, he stepped suddenly out from the bushes, and confronted the unsuspecting boys.

It was a stunning surprise, and they were thrown quite off their guard. Bruce turned pale and trembled; the cards fell from his limp fingers, and with the other hand he upset his glass of wine. Steve also turned pale under his ruddy skin, but he showed less agitation than his companion. He looked up with an angry scowl, and tossed a card down on the stone.

"What are you doing here, Linn Hilliard?" he demanded, in a sneering tone. "I never knew such a fellow for turning up at odd times. It looks mightily much as though you were dogging us.

"Go on, Bruce," he added. "It's your play."

He picked up his glass of wine and coolly drained the contents.

"You made us jump, Linn, bolting out on us in that way," said Bruce, beginning to gather up his cards with trembling fingers. "Of course we're not doing anything wrong—just having a little fun on the quiet. Did you want to see me?"

"Yes," replied Linn, "I wanted to see both of you. I want that four hundred and seventy-five dollars."

The boys fairly gasped with fright, and guilt was quickly stamped on their haggard faces.

"I—I don't understand, Linn," said Bruce. "What money are you talking about?"

"The money that you and Steve stole from your father last night," declared Linn. "You gave Deerfoot twenty-five dollars of it, and you have the rest with you now."

"You're a fool, Linn Hilliard," cried Steve, jumping up and clenching his fists. "Do you dare to call me a thief? Just say it again."

"I do say it again," replied Linn, standing fearlessly on his guard. "You're a thief, Steve Halsey, and you know it. It was you who dragged Bruce into this."

Steve flushed with rage, and made a motion to strike. But he prudently changed his mind, and lowered his arms, with a mocking laugh.

"What's the use of fighting?" he muttered. "I'd hit you quick enough, Linn, but I can afford to overlook such crazy talk. You are surely out of your senses. The idea of calling us thieves! Now, if it was the other way——"

"What do you mean?" demanded Linn.

"Oh, nothing in particular," said Steve, darting a quick and meaning glance at Bruce. "But you seem to know a great deal about this robbery, considering that the news hasn't reached the town yet."

"I heard of it from my father," said Linn, "and he got it from Mrs. Cameron. But long before that——"

"Then you haven't seen Captain Cameron yet?" interrupted Steve, in a peculiar tone, and with another glance at Bruce.

"Not yet," Linn answered, "but I intend to see him to-day."

He wondered vaguely and uneasily what this strange question could mean.

"The captain is more anxious to see you than you are to see him," Steve went on. "If I were you, Linn, I would skip out while I had the chance."

"I don't know what you are driving at," Linn cried,

angrily, "but you are on a wrong tack somewhere. Look here, do you fellows know that I was in the grounds of the Indian school last night?"

"Do we know it?" laughed Steve. "Well, I should say so! And others know it, too. I never gave you credit for so much cheek——"

"But do you know that I heard every word you and Bruce said when you were hidden in the bushes?" Linn interrupted; "that I heard you laying your dastardly plans to steal the money and fasten the crime on Deer-foot? Now deny it, if you can. I screened you last night, to my own cost, but the truth has got to come out now."

It was only too evident that this was news to Bruce and Steve—that they had heretofore been under the impression that Linn had not overheard a word of their conversation. The guilty lads stood silent and trembling, looking furtively at each other. It was pitiful to see the terror and confusion stamped on their faces.

Steve edged back, and leaned half defiantly against a tree. Bruce struggled hard to keep his self-control, and then broke down utterly, bursting into tears.

"You won't tell, Linn, will you?" he whimpered, imploringly. "Now, when it's too late I see what a fool I've been. Help me out of this scrape, Linn, and I'll never get into another one. If father finds out——"

"Shut up, you cowardly cry-baby," exclaimed Steve. "Don't confess to a lie. You know we never stole that money."

"We did," sobbed Bruce, "and I won't shut up. I wish I'd never seen you, Steve Halsey. It's well enough for you to talk, with your father dead, and only a guardian to get in a row with. But look at me! My father will take me away from college, and make me enlist as a private in the army—he threatened to do it over and over

again, and this time there's no escape. Why, I'd rather be dead than lead such a dog's life."

"Do save me, Linn," he went on, tearfully. "I'll do anything you say—I'll never have anything more to do with Steve and his set. Only don't let my father know of this. For the sake of old times, Linn, stand by me."

"And how about Deerfoot?" Linn cried, indignantly. "Is the poor fellow to suffer for a crime he never committed, after you encouraged him to escape, and led him into the trap, and gave him part of the stolen money? Why, it was the meanest and most dastardly thing I ever heard of. And you know well that Deerfoot will be torn apart before he will clear himself by telling the truth!"

"I'm afraid it's too late for repentance, Bruce. I warned you over and over again, and now you must take the consequences of not listening to me. Steve is mostly to blame, but that don't excuse you. I'm sorry for you, but I must do my duty all the same. Deerfoot is my friend, and he must be cleared at any cost."

"Of course, he must," Bruce readily admitted. "I know that, Linn. Suppose I put the money back, and get Deerfoot's innocence proved without giving myself away—will you keep mum then about what you know?"

"I don't see how such a thing is possible," Linn answered, doubtfully. "You're too deep in it for that, and it will take more than you think to clear Deerfoot entirely."

"I know it won't be easy," declared Bruce, "but I'll find a way to do it. Just trust me for that, and give me until this evening. The question is, will you promise?"

Linn hesitated a moment.

"I will give you until to-night," he reluctantly answered. "If Deerfoot is proved innocent by that time I will keep your secret."

"Thank you, Linn, thank you," Bruce cried, gratefully. "I'll never forget this. You'll see how differently I intend to behave in the future."

Meanwhile Steve had been leaning against the tree behind Linn, listening to the conversation with anger and scorn, and with an expression on his face that indicated deep and cunning thought.

Now he stepped quickly forward, holding a thick envelope partly concealed behind him. As he passed Linn, purposely jostling against him, he softly and skilfully slipped the envelope deep into the latter's coat pocket. Then he advanced to Bruce, drew him a few feet to one side, and began to whisper inaudibly into his ear.

Bruce changed color at the first words, and a look of horror and aversion came over his face; he shook his head, and whispered something in reply. But a moment later, as Steve continued talking to him, he seemed to yield and assent, and a strange gleam shone in his eyes.

"I wonder what's up now?" thought Linn. "Steve is putting more deviltry into Bruce's head, and he's winning him over, too. I can't let this go on. I'm sorry I made that promise."

He was about to interfere when a sudden and startling thing happened. With scarcely a sound the bushes on the edge of the run parted, and into the little glade dropped Deerfoot, limping painfully, and gasping hard for breath.

In spite of the partial school uniform that he wore—the blue trousers and flannel shirt—the young Indian pupil was transformed for the time being into a wild and untutored savage. His bosom heaved proudly, and his swarthy face was stamped with cruel hatred and defiance.

He was terribly exhausted, and as the three lads clustered around him he sank limply down on the stone.

"You help me hide," he panted, seeing, as he supposed,

that he was among friends. "Me jump from window—hurt foot when climb fence—no able run fast—they after me now."

Just then the crashing of bushes and the thud of hoofs was heard close by, and before Deerfoot could get to his feet Captain Cameron and two of the school guards—all mounted on horses—cleared the run at a leap, and rode on a trot into the glade.

The captain's companions instantly dismounted and seized Deerfoot. The young Sioux struggled hard and desperately, but in his exhausted condition he was speedily overcome and held fast.

"Well done, men," said Captain Cameron, as he swung himself off his steed. "I don't think he will give you any more trouble. You here, Bruce! How does this come?"

"And you, Linn," he added, in a stern and grave tone. "I am spared the painful necessity of a visit to your father. You will accompany me back to the school. I wish to have a conversation with you—and on no pleasant subject."

Meanwhile Steve had taken advantage of the confusion to thrust cards, glasses, and wine bottle into the bushes. Now, hearing the captain's words to Linn, he shot a meaning glance at Bruce and stepped forward.

"You have the right party, Captain Cameron," he said, loudly. "It was Linn Hilliard who stole the money last night. We made him own up to it just before you came."

CHAPTER VII.

A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

Linn, dazed and alarmed as he was by Captain Cameron's stern manner and significant words, could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses when he heard himself thus basely denounced by Steve Halsey. His face flushed to a deep red—which might have been taken for a sign of either guilt or innocence—and with clenched fists he turned angrily upon his accuser.

"How dare you——" he cried. Then he stopped short, realizing the consequences of giving way to passion, and by a hard effort he kept his self-control. "No, I won't strike you," he added. "I won't soil my hands by touching you, Steve. You will suffer for this wicked lie, though. Captain Cameron knows better than to believe such a thing."

"I don't wish to believe it," the captain said, gravely, "but I fear the circumstances point that way. Are you sure of this, Stephen? Is your friend telling the truth, Bruce?"

"Of course I am," exclaimed Steve. "Tell him so, Bruce. Speak up."

Bruce shivered slightly, and lifted a white and haggard face to meet his father's keen gaze.

"Yes, it's true," he said, in a faint and husky tone. "Linn owned up to it. He—he——"

"Stop, Bruce," Linn interrupted. "I can't believe this of you, and after what has just happened. Don't try to screen Steve any longer. He will only get you deeper

into the scrape, for the truth is bound to come out. Be a man, and make a clean breast of it all."

"Well, did I ever?" exclaimed Steve, with a mocking laugh. "Of all the cheek! You're playing a clever game of bluff, Linn, but it won't work. The idea of accusing us of the crime! You stole the money, and I wouldn't be afraid to bet that you have it about you now."

Linn turned to the captain.

"Please search me, sir," he said, proudly, "and then search Steve. I will take my turn first. I can explain everything, and I will do so when we are alone. For your own sake I would rather not speak now, in the presence of so many witnesses."

At this Bruce blushed with shame, and for an instant there was a faint look of contrition on his face; but it quickly vanished when he caught a threatening glance from Steve.

"You prefer not to speak for my sake?" the captain demanded, sternly. "I am ready to hear anything you wish to say, Linn. I don't like to search you, but at your own request I will do so."

Amid a deep and impressive silence, Captain Cameron stepped forward. The two guards, Sanders and Marsh, moved a little closer, bringing Deerfoot with them. Steve looked on boldly, and with an evil smile, but Bruce kept his eyes on the ground.

The captain began operations by plunging his hand reluctantly into the inner pocket of Linn's coat, and he at once drew out Deerfoot's letter. He took the paper from the envelope, and his knowledge of Indian sign-writing enabled him to interpret the missive almost at a glance. His face grew stern and angry.

"More proof," he muttered, half to himself. "So you had an appointment at the cave with Deerfoot this evening Linn?"

"The letter means that, sir," Linn replied.

"Then you admit it? And you were on the way to keep the appointment when I found you here?"

"Not at all, sir. I came here for quite a different purpose. I wanted to see Bruce and Steve——"

"Stop, my lad," interrupted the captain. "Don't add deceit to your wrong-doing. It were better to say nothing than to——"

As he spoke, Captain Cameron thrust his hand into one of Linn's side pockets, and with a sharp exclamation, he drew out a roll of bank-notes! Linn glanced at them, too dazed for an instant to comprehend what it meant. Then the truth flashed upon him, and his eyes blazed with anger.

"This is an infamous trick, Captain Cameron," he cried. "I did not know the money was there—I never saw it before. It was slipped into my pocket during the last few minutes."

"This is your doing, Steve Halsey!" he added, springing forward and clutching him savagely by the throat. "You hid the money there when my back was turned. You shall suffer for this, you dastardly thief! Own up to it—own up, I tell you!"

"Help! help!" Steve cried, hoarsely, as he struggled in the grasp of his assailant. "He's choking me!"

The captain quickly forced the lad's apart, and stood between them.

"Let us have no more of this, Linn!" he exclaimed. "I have been terribly deceived in you. Your guilt is beyond question, and yet you have the effrontery to fasten the crime on others. How dare you deny it? Here is the stolen money, taken from your very person."

"I knew he had it," whimpered Steve, feeling his injured throat. "He wanted us to keep quiet and not give

him away. And because I told the truth he tries to drag me into the matter."

"You don't need any dragging, you thief!" retorted Linn. "You'll be begging for mercy soon enough."

"I swear I am innocent, Captain Cameron," he added, earnestly. "This is a cunning plot, and circumstances are against me now. But I can clear myself."

By this time the captain had finished searching Linn, and without discovering any more money.

"I would like to see you cleared, Linn," he replied, "but I doubt if it can be done. In fact, I can't believe in your innocence—the finding of this money is but a link in a long chain of evidence. I have but one hundred dollars here. Where is the balance?"

"I repeat that I am innocent," cried Linn. "I know nothing of this money, except that it was slipped into my pocket. Steve can tell you where it is. Either he has hidden it, or it will be found on him."

"Search me, Captain Cameron," demanded Steve, with an injured air. "And search Bruce, too. This lying fellow is trying to implicate both of us."

He triumphantly turned all his pockets inside out, and Bruce reluctantly did the same, studiously avoiding Linn's scornful glance.

"The rest of the money is hidden some place," asserted Linn, "and Steve knows where. If you still insist upon believing me guilty, Captain Cameron, I will tell you the whole story now. But I would rather you should hear it from Bruce. Steve's evil influence is all that keeps him from speaking."

On hearing these words, and happening to meet Linn's eye, Bruce looked repentant and ashamed. He understood that Linn pitied him, and still desired to screen him as much as possible. He might have broken down and

confessed all had he not caught a timely and threatening glance from Steve.

"Don't stand there like a stick, Bruce," cried his confederate. "Because you and Linn are old friends, is no reason why you should let him lie about you."

"Of course not," admitted Bruce, in a low tone, "but I am sorry for Linn. It is just as Steve says, father—Linn is trying to screen himself at my expense."

"There, you hear that, Linn," cried Steve. "Now go ahead and tell your story—whatever it is. I'm anxious to see how big a lie you have concocted."

"It won't be a lie," replied Linn, who was more surprised than angered by Steve's boldness and daring. "You know what is coming, Steve, and I don't pity you. I'm sorry for Bruce, though, for you have led him into this. I will tell you the whole thing now, Captain Cameron, much as I dislike to do so. And the story will explain why I was found in the school grounds last night——"

"Wait, Linn," sternly interrupted the captain. "I don't wish to hear any untruths. I am satisfied that Stephen and my son can throw no light on this matter. But there is one here who can."

"Deerfoot," he added, turning to the young Indian, "it will be to your interest to make a full confession. Who helped you to steal the money last night?"

"Me no steal money," was the sullen reply. "Money was give to me. Me know nothing of steal."

Deerfoot was resolved to hold fast to his sense of honor, and he evidently had no clear knowledge of the situation. He did not understand Linn's unfortunate plight, but had a vague idea that his silence would benefit both Linn and Bruce.

"Where did you get the twenty-five dollars?" the captain resumed, sternly.

"Money was give to me," Deerfoot muttered. "Me no tell more."

"It is useless to question him," said the captain. "I know his dogged obstinacy too well. But his confession is not needed to prove your guilt, Linn. Alas! it is only too clear. You saw where I placed the five hundred dollars last night, and you and Deerfoot—whom you have been very intimate with of late—planned to steal it. You were watching the window when Sanders caught you, and you had the audacity to return a second time after being put out of the grounds. Which of you stole the money I don't know, but between you the deed was done. Then you separated, Deerfoot retaining twenty-five dollars, and you taking the balance. But for Deerfoot's capture you might have escaped suspicion——"

"Stop, Captain Cameron!" cried Linn. "Appearances are dead against me, but I am innocent. Wait till you hear my story. I followed Bruce and Steve to the school last night, suspecting that they were up to some mischief. I crept close up to them while they were hidden in the bushes near your window, and I heard them planning to steal the money and fasten the crime on Deerfoot. It was all arranged for them to escape. And it was for Bruce's sake that I refused to answer your question when I was caught. He dare not deny it——"

"My son was in bed at the time you speak of," interrupted the captain, with a burst of anger. "This story is a vile fabrication—a tissue of lies. Shame on you, Linn, to accuse an innocent lad. Bruce's honesty is above reproach. You are the thief!"

"I am innocent," cried Linn, fairly losing heart at the terrible chain of evidence that had been woven around him. "I implore you to believe me, Captain Cameron. Deerfoot can clear us, and you know that he is truthful. He don't understand the situation I am in, or he would

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have spoken long ago. Explain it to him, or let me do it."

But Linn was not destined to receive a vindication from this quarter. As he concluded his impassioned appeal, Deerfoot seized an opportunity for which he had been watching and waiting for some time. By a vigorous jerk, he tore loose from his captors, dashed by Linn and the captain, and sped out of sight on the narrow path that led between the creek and the cliff to Alexander's Cave.

Sanders and Marsh started in hot pursuit, followed by Steve and Bruce. Captain Cameron brought up the rear, pulling Linn along with him by the arm.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISOWNED AND DISGRACED.

Evidently Captain Cameron was determined that Linn should not escape, as his supposed confederate had just done. He kept a tight grip on the lad's arm, and though they moved as rapidly as the narrowness of the path would admit—and at imminent risk of slipping into the creek—they were far outdistanced by the rest of the party. The three horses, meanwhile, had been left standing in the glade at the mouth of the run, quietly grazing on the grass.

A sharp turn of the path finally brought Linn and the captain to the yawning, black mouth of Alexander's Cave. In the entrance stood Bruce, Steve, and the two guards, all very much heated and excited.

"It's no use, captain," cried Sanders. "He's given us the slip."

"Gone in the cave, do you mean?" demanded Captain Cameron. "That's bad. I'm sorry you couldn't overtake him in time."

"We did our level best, sir," said Marsh, "but he ran like a deer, in spite of his sprained ankle."

"We followed him back to where the passage ends at the wall," added Sanders, "and saw him shin up like a cat and wriggle through the crevice at the top. It was no use to follow without a light."

"No, that's true," admitted the captain, who seemed much vexed and angered. "This is a most provoking affair, and it must be entirely settled before I leave for

Washington; I can't postpone the trip later than to-morrow night. Leaving the theft out of the question, Deerfoot must be caught and made an example of before the other pupils. There have been too many escapes, or attempted escapes, recently, and I intend to put a stop to it once for all."

"It won't be easy to find him, father," said Bruce. "The cave has about a thousand rooms and passages in it, and all sorts of queer nooks and holes."

"And the young rascal has no light," added Sanders. "He'll get himself hopelessly lost, and starve to death."

"I don't think it is quite so bad as that," replied Captain Cameron, "but he has certainly done a foolish thing in taking refuge in the cave. If he counts on escaping in the end he will find himself mistaken. This is the only outlet."

"There is said to be another one," asserted Bruce. "You remember about the dog——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted his father. "That story was never corroborated, and is too doubtful for belief."

"Prompt action is needed," the captain went on, "and I see only one thing to do. Sanders, I will leave you and Marsh here to guard the mouth of the cavern. Keep a sharp watch, and do not stir from your post on any pretext whatever. I will return as soon as possible with a search party and lanterns. And I will try to get old Toby Gunnison to act as guide. He knows more about the cave than any man living—though that's not saying much. However, a thorough search of the passage will result in the capture of the fugitive."

"Father, may Steve and I stay here with the men?" asked Bruce. "Our boat is up at the mouth of the run, and we have some lunch in a basket."

"Yes, you may stay," replied the captain, after a moment's thought. "This is the safest place for you. If I

let you go you would probably publish the news to the whole town within half an hour, and I don't want that to happen.

"Now, Linn," the captain added, sternly, "I have one question to ask you. A truthful answer can do you no harm, but will prove to your advantage. Where is the rest of the stolen money—the three hundred and seventy-five dollars?"

"I know nothing of it, Captain Cameron," Linn answered, hoarsely. "Is it possible that you persist in believing me guilty? I am the victim of a most fiendish plot, and if Deerfoot were here, I am sure he could and would clear me. Nor have you heard all of my story. Let me tell it in full, and I am satisfied that I can convince you——"

"No, not a word," interrupted the captain. "You have been well schooled in lying and deceit, and I don't wish to burden your soul with any more sins. Deerfoot is not here, and if he was, I doubt if he could clear you. I shall take you home with me now, and keep you there until I have made arrangements for the cave to be searched. Then I will turn you over to your father, and he may deal with you as he sees fit. Come, I have no time to waste."

Knowing that further appeal would be useless, Linn quietly submitted to be taken by the arm, and led forward along the path. As he passed around the bend he looked back, and saw Steve watching him with a smile of wicked triumph. Bruce had turned his back, and was talking to Sanders.

The horses were found where they had been left, and Captain Cameron tied one of them to a small tree. He mounted another, and helped Linn to climb into the saddle of the third. Then he took the lad's bridle and his

own, and they rode across the run and up the rugged hollow of the ravine.

It was a sad and bitter ride for Linn. Twice he attempted to speak, in the hope of proving his innocence by telling the whole story; but each time the captain sternly and angrily cut him short, saying that he wished to hear nothing.

After that the lad rode on in gloomy silence. The future seemed black and almost hopeless, for he was aware what a terrible chain of circumstantial evidence had been woven around him, and he felt that his own story, unsupported by proof, might utterly fail to clear him. The thought of Steve's base conduct made him fairly tremble with rage, but he still felt some slight pity and affection for Bruce, knowing that he had been led astray by a stronger and more evil mind than his own.

"I have two chances," he said to himself. "Bruce is not entirely bad, and he is already ashamed of what he has done. If I can talk to him apart from Steve he may confess everything and clear me. And Deerfoot will certainly clear me if he is caught, and can be made to understand the situation. As soon as he realizes the fix I am in, he will own up to getting the money from Bruce.

"But suppose they don't find Deerfoot! He may keep out of the way of the searchers, or possibly he may lose himself in some hole or passage, and never be found. Alexander's Cave is a terrible place, and nobody knows all its ins and outs. Well, I hope something will turn up soon. If father is persuaded that I am guilty of this theft there will be no end to his passion."

By this time the school was reached, and Captain Cameron and his companion rode in at the main gate, passing through groups of curious young Indians, who were eager for news of Deerfoot. As soon as he dismounted, Linn was turned over to a guard, and a little later he

found himself locked up in the cellar under the sleeping quarters—in a small and gloomy cell, without windows, which was used for refractory pupils.

It was still early in the afternoon, and for hours Linn was kept a prisoner. The greater part of the time he paced up and down the damp floor, alternately hopeful and despondent, as he reflected on the chances of proving his innocence or being proved guilty.

It was quite dark when a guard opened the door and led Linn up the steps, and out into the grounds. He conducted him straight to the captain's house, and into a room on the first floor which was used as a library and office. Here, beside a table on which a lamp was burning brightly, the lad found his father and Captain Cameron sitting.

"Linn, here is your father," said the captain. "I sent for him in order to avoid as much publicity as possible. I hope his persuasions will have more effect on you than mine have had."

Mr. Hilliard rose to his feet, trembling slightly. His face was pale with anger, and there was a look of agony and grief in his sunken eyes.

"I have heard all this terrible story," he said, hoarsely. "The captain has informed me of your crime, and of your obstinate refusal to confess. He has told me of your dastardly conduct in trying to fasten the robbery on two of your companions. I cannot doubt your guilt. I refused you twenty-five dollars yesterday, and you turn around and steal five hundred. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Father, have you ever known me to be dishonest?" cried Linn, struggling hard to keep his composure. "I swear I am innocent, sir—I implore you to believe me. I have never told you a lie, and I won't do so now. Appearances are terribly against me—I admit that—but

when you have heard the whole story you must believe me innocent."

As calmly as possible, the lad related the adventures of the previous night—how he had gone out for a walk, and met Steve and Bruce; how he suspected them, and followed them into the grounds of the Indian School, and how he had overheard their conversation, and then been caught by Sanders. He ended by telling of the search for the lads that morning, and of what had happened after he found them along the creek.

"That is all," he concluded, earnestly, "but every word is true."

"Your son has told a clever string of falsehoods, Mr. Hilliard," exclaimed the captain, "much as it grieves me to say so. He is still bent on shifting the robbery on others. Bruce was in bed at the time Linn was caught in the grounds, and I am satisfied that he had been there for at least an hour. And I have taken pains to ascertain that Stephen Halsey was in his room at the college all evening. Two of his fellow-students corroborate this statement of Stephen's."

"It is all false!" cried Linn, losing heart and self-possession in the face of this added evidence. "Bruce could not have been in bed five minutes, and Steve is making his friends lie for him. I am innocent, father—oh, please believe me! The truth is bound to come out. Wait until Deerfoot is brought back. He can clear me, and he will do it, too. He knows——"

Just then there came a startling interruption. Footsteps were heard on the porch and in the hall, and Sanders strode into the room, flushed and excited.

"It's all up with the Indian, Captain Cameron," he cried. "We followed his tracks into a new passage that old Toby Gunnison never knew of before, and the footprints ended at a big hole thirty feet deep. There's run-

ning water below, and Deerfoot must have tumbled down to his death. There ain't the shadow of a chance for him."

Captain Cameron turned pale.

"This is terrible news," he said. "I am busy now, Sanders. Go outside, and I will join you presently."

As Sanders left the room, the captain turned to Linn.

"You hear?" he questioned. "If this is true—and I fear it is—Deerfoot's story of the crime will never be told. Confess, my boy. Fall on your knees, and beg your father's forgiveness."

"That he shall never have!" cried the banker, bringing his fist down on the table in a spasm of rage. "Liar and thief, I disown you! You are no longer a son of mine. You are the first Hilliard to disgrace the name. I will pay back the five hundred dollars and save you from the penalty of the law. Here is the money that was found in your pocket. Take it. It is the last penny you will get from me."

He strode over to Linn, and thrust the roll of bank-notes into the lad's bosom.

"Now go!" he thundered, in a voice that shook with passion. "I don't care what becomes of you. Never let me see your face again—never dare to darken my door!"

Without a word, Linn put on his hat and left the room. He passed out of the house, heedless of Captain Cameron's summons to come back, and vanished in the darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

With his brain in a whirl of passion, indignation and grief, Linn Hilliard strode instinctively across the Indian School grounds to the broken board in the fence. He found the place still unrepaired—and no doubt, undiscovered—and quickly crept through to the road.

Amid the chaos of conflicting thoughts, two things were uppermost in the lad's mind as he stumbled along in the darkness, drifting without aim or purpose toward the town. And these two things were the cruel and unjust treatment he had just received at the hands of his father, and the terrible fate of Deerfoot.

He did not doubt that Deerfoot was dead; and while he felt a great sorrow and pity for him he did not fail to realize the effect upon his own fortunes which the disaster to the young Indian was sure to have. There was no immediate prospect of his innocence being proved. Bruce alone could do that, and Linn had no hopes from that quarter.

When he thought of the scene in Captain Cameron's house hot tears came into the lad's eyes. He could hardly comprehend the truth. It was difficult to believe that he had been disowned and cast out—driven away from home with bitter and angry words, and bidden never to darken his father's door again.

He felt a bulky object pressed between his coat and vest, and suddenly remembered the money. He drew it out, and was about to cast it passionately away when a

strong impulse stayed his hand. He rolled the bank-notes into a wad, and put them safely in his pocket.

"I had better swallow my pride," he said to himself. "This is the last money I'm likely to see for some time, and I think I will hold onto it, much as I hate to do so. Indeed, I can't do without it. I don't intend to stay in Carlisle, and I have no desire to turn tramp. I never had a hundred dollars before, and this ought to last me a long time."

Linn had more of his share of the family pride, and this prevented him from yielding to despair, as well as helping him to make a speedy decision as to his future plans. On reaching the outskirts of the town, he seated himself on the edge of the curb, in the deep shadow of a tree. A flood of emotion overwhelmed him, and he wept bitterly for several minutes. Then he half angrily dried his tears, and choked down a lump in his throat.

"I won't make such a baby of myself again," he muttered. "I have a new life before me now, and I must face it like a man. The past is dead and over, and I won't think of it more than I can help. Good-by to college, and home, and friends.

"Father is not himself when he is angry," he went on, "and he was in a terrible passion to-night. I know he has always loved me in his own way, and does so yet. In a day or two he will be sorry, and will want me back. He will find that his repentance is too late, though. I forgive him freely enough, but I won't return until he sends for me and admits that I am innocent. I'm afraid he won't find that out for a long while, since Deerfoot is dead, and Bruce is under the influence of Steve Halsey. In time the truth will be discovered—either through Bruce or in some other way—but it may not be for years.

"Well, I must wait patiently for that time to come. I know just what I shall do. From here I will go straight

to the West. I have a good education, and I don't think I will have any trouble in getting a position that will pay me enough to live on. After I am settled I will wait at least a year, then I will drop father a line to let him know where I am. I will give him to understand that I won't return until my innocence has been proved.

"When I do come back there will be a day of reckoning for some one," the lad resumed, angrily, after a pause. "I may forgive Bruce, though I don't feel much like it now. But Steve I will never forgive. He shall suffer for his dastardly conduct in fastening the robbery on me——"

At this point Linn's reflections were interrupted by a shrill and distant sound that echoed far on the night air.

"There's the ten o'clock accommodation whistling for Middlesex," he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "Now for it! I couldn't have a better chance of slipping quietly out of town, and the sooner it is over the better. If there are any Carlisle people on the train they will get off at the station, and it's not likely any passengers from here will be going down the valley at this time of night."

On a rapid walk, Linn pushed along the main street of the town, through which the railroad tracks run. Owing to the lateness of the hour he reached and passed the station without attracting attention, and halted a few yards beyond, in the shadow of a freight car.

He was just in time. A moment later the train came rolling along, and the forward car stopped directly opposite Linn. He waited until the passengers were out, and then stepped aboard the train just as it began to move slowly forward. He entered the smoker, and a glance showed him that no familiar faces were there. Pulling his hat well down on his forehead, he dropped into an empty seat in the rear end, and when the conductor came along he paid his fare out of a five-dollar bill.

The hour's ride seemed very short to the lad, engrossed as he was in his gloomy thoughts of the future on which he was embarking. He was surprised when the train rumbled out on the long Susquehanna bridge, and thrusting his head from the window, he watched with interest the countless lights of Harrisburg flashing on the opposite shore and the great dome of the Capitol with its illuminated clocks staring like fiery eyes.

Gliding off the bridge the train plunged abruptly into the lower end of the city, and soon stopped under the immense vault of the Union Station. With a feeling of loneliness and depression, Linn followed the swarm of passengers up through the gates, fearful of being recognized and hailed at any instant, for he was known to a number of persons in Harrisburg.

The bulletin board in the waiting-room informed him that a fast train left for the West shortly after midnight, and he at first decided to take it. But on second thoughts he concluded to wait until morning. He was tired and hungry, and did not care to trust himself to the doubtful comforts of a sleeping-car berth. Also, he preferred a daylight ride, because the country he was to pass through was new to him.

"I will get something to eat first," he reflected, "and then I will go to a hotel and enjoy a good and easy night's rest."

Passing out of the station, Linn found himself on Market street, and it put him in better spirits to see the blaze of electric lights and shops, and the noisy tide of people, cabs and motor cars. Though after eleven o'clock, this main part of the city was full of life and bustle.

The Cafe Russ was close by, and here Linn enjoyed a hearty and leisurely meal. It was past midnight when he came out, and now there were so few people in sight that he had little fear of recognition. He went two

blocks up the street to the Keystone Hotel, and registered under a false name. Since he had no baggage, he was politely requested to pay in advance, and having done this he was shown to a room on the fourth floor.

It was a small but comfortable apartment, neatly furnished, and with a coil of rope—for use in case of fire—suspended on a hook by the window. In spite of the thrilling and wearisome events of the day, Linn was in no mood for sleep. He closed the door without locking it, and turned the gas higher.

On the bureau he found a copy of the *New York Weekly*, evidently left there by some recent guest. He picked this up, and sitting down in a chair his thoughts were soon deep in a most interesting story.

He had been reading for half an hour when he heard rapid footsteps coming along the corridor. They came straight to the room, and as the door was thrown wide open Linn glanced up in surprise and alarm.

CHAPTER X.

LINN SAVES HIS NEW FRIEND.

Linn's unexpected and uninvited visitor was a tall and straight young man, with brown eyes and closely-cut hair of the same color, a ruddy and bronzed complexion, and a slight mustache. He was apparently about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, and wore a suit of gray tweed and a derby hat.

He paused a few feet within the door, and as he glanced around the room a look of surprise and annoyance crossed his face, giving away quickly to a pleasant smile and a blush of confusion.

"By Jove, what a stupid I am!" he exclaimed. "I'm sure I beg your pardon—I've mistaken your room for mine. What floor is this, if you please?"

"The fourth," Linn answered.

He felt greatly relieved to know that the intruder had not come to take him back to Carlisle, and, moreover, he was favorably impressed by this tall and handsome young gentleman.

"The fourth floor?" said the stranger, with a merry laugh. "That accounts for it, then. My room occupies the same position on the floor below, and I left the gas burning when I went out. You see I came one story too high on the elevator. I hope you'll pardon me for intruding——"

"Of course I will," said Linn. "It was a natural mistake, and any person might have done the same thing."

"You are very kind," replied the stranger. "Mistakes

of this sort are awkward sometimes. You remember Mr. Pickwick's adventure, don't you? I'm glad you're not an old lady with curl papers."

"So am I," assented Linn, with a laugh.

The other laughed, too, and for a moment he stood looking at Linn in a friendly manner.

"I must be off," he said. "I'm afraid I've interrupted your reading. I see you have a copy of the *New York Weekly* there. Have you read the Nick Carter story?"

"I just finished that one," replied Linn. "It's splendid."

"So it is. I read them every week. And what do you think of Nick Carter and his methods? Do you believe they are practicable and possible for a real detective?"

"I haven't thought much about it," said Linn. "But if I were Nick Carter, and you had come to consult me, I think I should say that you were a soldier."

"What makes you think so?" asked the visitor, with a smile.

"Your stiff and straight walk," Linn answered, "and the way you carry yourself. But, of course, I would be wrong, for you have no uniform——"

"Soldiers don't wear their uniforms all the time," interrupted the stranger. "In fact, I am a soldier—Lieutenant Percy Dimsdale, at your service. I have been out of West Point for two years, and am on my way home to Maryland for a short furlough. I stopped off in Harrisburg to see a friend."

Linn looked with admiration and envy at the young officer, and he suddenly became aware that his old longing for a soldier's life was still strong and keen within him. He shrank with horror and distaste from the career which he had so lately planned for himself—the drudgery and toil of a clerk in some Western town.

"I am very glad to have made your acquaintance, Lieu-

tenant Dimsdale," he said. "I have always wanted to be a soldier myself. What are the chances nowadays for a young fellow to enlist and work his way upward from the ranks?"

"The chances for that are never very bright," was the reply, "but in these times, when there is so much trouble out on the frontier, a young recruit with the right stuff in him has a fair show to climb the ladder of promotion."

"And in time, if he was well educated, he would stand on the same level with a West Point graduate?" asked Linn. "I mean, could he get to be lieutenant, and would he have equal chances for the future?"

"Yes, I think he would. It depends a great deal on bravery and obedience, and on taking advantage of what opportunities turn up. We're talking now about a well-educated private. It would be different, you understand, with an ignorant man, no matter what else he was. And then, being on active service has everything to do with it. A young recruit, even if he had all the qualities in him to make a great general, would stand no show at all if he was tied down in some Eastern army post."

Lieutenant Dimsdale was an enthusiast in his profession, and, seeing that he had an interested listener, he talked rapidly and for some time of a soldier's life, painting it in bright and glowing colors, and never dreaming that Linn was taking his words to heart and storing them away for future encouragement.

"I don't know that I would advise a friend of mine to enlist," he concluded, "because it would be taking too great a responsibility on myself. But if I had failed to enter West Point I would surely have started in the ranks. As I said before, now is the time for a brave, steady, and educated recruit to win his way up—provided he can get on the frontier. Just at present things are quiet, but it won't be long until the Indians are kicking up a row

again. And there are plenty of officers of high rank out West who started at the bottom and never saw the inside of West Point.

"But you haven't told me your name yet," he added. "We met in a queer way to-night, and we've had quite a pleasant talk. I hope we may run across each other in the future."

Linn hesitated briefly, not knowing what to say. Then, on the spur of the moment, he answered:

"My name is Osborne—Linn Osborne," giving the name by which he had registered. "I am on my way West, and if you are quartered out there we may meet again."

"I am quartered out there," replied the young officer, rising to his feet, "and I expect to be on my way back to the frontier in a month. But the West is a big place, and—— Hello! what's that?"

A cry of fire—that most terrible of cries in the night—rang faintly from far below, and was followed by a confused babel of voices and slamming of doors. A moment later the street was alive with shouting and hurrying feet, and then a bell began to clang loudly and furiously.

"The hotel is on fire," exclaimed Linn.

"I hope not," cried Lieutenant Dimsdale, "but it sounds that way. And we are up on the top floor!"

They rushed from the room together, and as soon as they reached the corridor they knew the worst. At the further end were the staircase and the elevator shaft, situated close together, and from this quarter heavy volumes of black smoke were rolling forward.

"Come on!" cried Linn. "Make for the stairs, for the elevator won't be running. There may be time yet to escape."

As they fled along the corridor a man burst out of a room on the left, shouting at the top of his voice. He

collided with Linn, and the latter went sprawling to the floor. Lieutenant Dimsdale tripped over him, and in falling he struck his head on the sharp edge of a trunk that stood close by.

The man who was the cause of the accident rushed on without stopping and vanished in the smoke. Linn jumped to his feet and bent over his companion, calling him by name. There was no reply. The young officer lay still and quiet, the blood trickling from an ugly gash on his forehead. But his heart was beating all right, as Linn quickly discovered.

In this terrible situation the lad did not lose his presence of mind. He believed there was a chance of saving himself, but he was resolved not to abandon his helpless and unconscious friend. He darted forward to see what the prospect was, but the stifling smoke brought him to a stand-still at a distance of a dozen feet from the stairway.

Both here and out of the elevator shaft dense volumes of smoke were rolling up, and a red glare danced and flickered on the ceiling overhead. The roar of the flames mingled with the shouting and commotion on the lower floors. Evidently the fire had started on the first floor, and had immediately been sucked upward toward the roof.

"It's too late to escape by the stairs," muttered Linn. "There's only one chance left, and that's by the fire-escape. The rope has got to save us both, for I won't leave that poor fellow here to perish. I hope he is not too heavy for me to handle."

Gasping for breath, and with smarting eyes, he hurried back to Lieutenant Dimsdale. The young officer lay where he had fallen, still unconscious. Linn mopped the blood from his forehead as well as he could, took him around the waist, and started to drag him to the room they had left. He had to perform the task unaided, for

the only other guest on the fourth floor was the man who had rushed down the stairs a moment before, and it was doubtful if he had passed safely through the smoke and flame.

Linn's strength stood him in good stead, and he finally reached the room with his helpless burden. Dropping the young officer across the bed, he threw up the window and looked out. The street was crowded with shouting people, and two fire-engines had already arrived. The conflagration was confined to the further end of the hotel, and most of the inmates seemed to have escaped. The front of the building was unprovided with the modern iron fire-escapes, and here and there a solitary figure was slipping down a rope to the ground.

Directly beneath Linn the firemen had raised a ladder to the second floor, and a few persons were escaping by this means. The lad quickly took the coil of rope from the hook, saw that the noose was all right, and then turned to the bed.

Lieutenant Dimsdale had come to his senses, and was trying feebly to rise.

"Where am I?" he muttered. "How did I get hurt? Oh, I remember now—the hotel is on fire, and I fell against that trunk. Don't risk your life for me—save yourself——"

"I'm going to save you first," exclaimed Linn. "It's all right—we're not in any danger. Stand up till I get the rope around you, and then try to climb over the window sill."

Dizzy and weak as he was, the young officer got to his feet, and with Linn's assistance the rope was slipped under his shoulders, and he was lowered from the window, holding fast to the rope with both hands. The crowd saw the incident from below, and cheered loudly and eagerly.

It was hard work for Linn, and he gritted his teeth as he paid the line out, foot by foot. At last the strain slackened, and he looked down to see the firemen on the ladder disengage the noose from Lieutenant Dimsdale and bear him to the ground.

It was now his own turn, and he did not hesitate to make the dizzy venture. The smoke was curling into the room as he climbed over the window-sill, and took a firm grip on the rope. Down he went, hand over hand, and a minute later he stood safely on the pavement, none the worse for his experience, except for his smarting palms.

Lieutenant Dimsdale had already been removed to the office of a neighboring physician, and after learning that none of the guests of the hotel were missing, Linn crossed to the opposite side of the street. There he stood for an hour, and by the end of that time the fire was under control, though the interior of the building was said to be completely gutted.

Fearing that some one in the crowd would recognize him, Linn now slipped away, and went to another hotel nearer the station. Here he enjoyed a few hours' sleep, and after an early breakfast, he hurried off to catch the through train to the West. He was anxious to see Lieutenant Dimsdale again, but he concluded that it would not be prudent to do so.

CHAPTER XI.

OFF TO THE FRONTIER.

Linn reached the station just as the train was called, and, hurriedly buying his ticket and a paper, he passed through the gates and took his seat in a car that was not uncomfortably full. A moment later he was off, and he looked out of the window until the train had crossed the Susquehanna by the long bridge at Rockville, and was flying westward through the Kittatinny Gap.

Then he remembered the paper. It was an early morning edition, and a whole column on the front page was devoted to the fire. His assumed name figured prominently, and with burning cheeks he read the interview between the reporter and Lieutenant Dimsdale, in which the latter told how he had been bravely rescued by a young gentleman named Osborne.

"The young officer's injury is a slight one," the article went on to say, "and he is resting comfortably as we go to press. He expressed a strong desire to find Mr. Osborne, who so gallantly snatched him from the clutches of the flames, and who disappeared mysteriously after the fire."

"What a lot of fuss about nothing!" said Linn to himself, as he laid the paper aside. "I don't think Lieutenant Dimsdale will find me. I am sorry I had to leave him so abruptly, though. He is a fine fellow, and he did me a good service last night—a greater one, perhaps, than I did for him. The future looks pretty bright now, and

I'm not going to think of the bitter past any more than I can help. It's queer how the old passion for a soldier's life wakened up when I met that young officer. I thought it was dead years ago, but it was there all the time."

Could Lieutenant Dimsdale have known what was passing in the supposed Mr. Osborne's mind he would probably have been made very uncomfortable, and he would certainly have regretted his conversation of the previous night. He had spoken sincerely, it is true, but without the slightest idea that his listener would take the advice to himself. Therefore he had painted a new recruit's career in glowing colors—as was his duty as an officer of the United States Army—but purposely omitting the darker and doubtful side of the story. As a personal friend, he would have told Linn not to enlist with any assurance of winning his way upward from the ranks, and would likely have given him some wholesome and unpalatable advice in addition.

But Linn did not know this. He accepted the young officer's statements in perfect trust, drinking them in eagerly and taking from them much guidance and encouragement for his own career. Indeed, he had resolved to be a soldier even before that conversation was half over, and to this he still held fast.

He thought calmly and confidently of the prospect as the fast express train whirled him on through the rugged mountains and pastoral scenery of Pennsylvania. He had only kindly feelings for his father, and he no longer felt the same bitterness toward Bruce or fierce hatred of Steve Halsey. At the end of three or five years, he told himself, he would go home on a visit with an officer's uniform and sword—go home to find his innocence proved, and to enjoy a complete vindication and a thrilling triumph among his old friends.

Of the trials, difficulties, and humble position of a private soldier Linn knew little, nor, had he been fully informed, would he have allowed himself to be daunted. He was strong, plucky, and well educated, and his mind was firmly set on carving out a military career, in spite of all and any obstacles that he might meet.

There were a few knotty points at the outset, but Linn planned how to conquer these as he traveled westward that day. Some time before he had seen the recruiting circular issued by the office at Harrisburg, and he remembered pretty clearly what was required of an applicant for enlistment.

The long ride came to an end at last, and late in the afternoon Linn left the train at Pittsburg. He knew there was a recruiting station here, and an inquiry at the depot gave him the information he wanted. Ten minutes later he reached the place. A colored lithograph representing a group of officers and privates was posted up outside, and a uniformed sergeant was solemnly marching to and fro on the pavement before the door.

This individual ushered the lad up stairs and into the presence of the recruiting officer. The latter was a man of about forty, with a pleasing expression and kindly eyes.

Linn briefly and coolly explained his wish, concluding with a stipulation made in positive terms.

"I want to be sent straight to the frontier," he said, "where I will find opportunities of advancement. If I enlist it is with that understanding."

"Your request is rather unusual," replied the officer, "but I think it can be arranged if you pass muster. How old are you?"

"Eighteen," Linn answered, with a slight trace of hesitation, and an inward feeling of contrition and shame.

The officer did not doubt this statement after glancing keenly at the applicant's sturdy build.

"You are unmarried, of course?" he resumed.

"Yes, sir," was the smiling reply.

"And what of your character and habits? I suppose you can produce a certificate——"

"No, sir; I can't do that," Linn said, quickly. "But I assure you on my honor that I am all a gentleman should be. I have good reasons for wishing to enlist. I have always wanted to be a soldier, and as West Point is out of the question, I have chosen this course."

The officer hesitated a moment. It was doubtless his duty to insist upon a clearer statement, but he liked the lad's looks and his straightforward speech; and, moreover, the recruiting business had been very slack and dull of late.

So the upshot of it was that Linn was excused from further questioning, and was taken to an inner room to be weighed and examined by two privates in the presence of the recruiting officer. He passed through the ordeal with flying colors, and after slipping on his clothes he took the oath of service.

He was now a duly enlisted private in the regular army, sworn under the name of Linn Osborne to serve for five years at the monthly pay of thirteen dollars, and entitled to receive rations, clothes, bedding, and medical attendance from the Government. He also had the privilege of discharge at the end of three years, providing he had served faithfully and obediently during that time.

Linn retained a few dollars of his money, and gave the rest to the recruiting officer, taking a receipt for it. He was provided with sleeping quarters in the building, and here he spent three days. Then, with five other recruits, he was sent off to Columbus Barracks, where he spent

eight weeks of daily toil and instruction under a drill-master.

At the end of that period he was sent out with a batch of soldiers to Fort Sandiman, which was located on the Missouri River in South Dakota, close to the reservation of the Brule Sioux.

CHAPTER XII.

A CALL TO SERVICE FOR TROOP A.

The sun had vanished behind the bluffs of the Missouri, and the soft September twilight was gathering over Fort Sandiman, with its groups of dusky buildings that housed a regiment of infantry and six troops of cavalry, and its surrounding picket fence cordoned by blue-coated sentries.

The day's routine of toil had ended, supper was over, and now had come the hours of leisure and recreation that would be cut short all too soon by the imperative sound of taps. Here and there strolled troopers and infantrymen, smoking and chatting; the parade-ground was dotted with ladies in evening dress, and their gayly-uniformed escorts; lights were appearing in the long, shed-like barracks of the men, in the cozier quarters of the officers, in the handsome residence of the colonel, and in the company offices.

Dim figures flitted by the open windows of the hospital, and from the stables came the champing and clatter of horses. The telegraph operator was dozing in his den, his legs crossed over his table, and a newspaper held carelessly in his hand. Close by on a bench outside the sutler's store, sat half a dozen men belonging to Troop A.

This was Private Osborne's own troop, and Linn was with the group that evening, listening to the conversation and laughter in silence, and with a thoughtful and sober expression on his face. His home and college life in distant Carlisle seemed far, far away to the lad, though

scarcely four months had elapsed since he went forth to banishment under the shadow of a crime, and enlisted on a soldier's career.

But his dreams of the future had not come true, nor did he see any chance of attaining the hopes on which he had set his heart. In the two months spent at Fort Sandiman he had shown himself to have the making of a good soldier; he had performed his duties faithfully, patiently, and even with a keen relish; he had come under the approving eyes of colonel and majors, had won the liking and respect of his comrades, and had formed close friendships with many of them.

One unfortunate thing, however, barred his way to advancement, and this fact was already known to the men of Troop A, and was frequently commented on. Captain Norman, the commanding officer of the troop, had formed a strong dislike to the new recruit, and took little pains to conceal his feelings.

Linn's imprudence was partly to blame, for on first coming to the fort he had spoken rather freely, and with boyish thoughtlessness, of what he intended to do—how he was determined to rise from the ranks by zeal and attention, and in time to win himself an officer's sword and uniform.

He soon learned to become more close-mouthed, but not before the mischief was done. His words came to the ears of Captain Norman, and the latter regarded them as a mixture of impudence and presumption. The captain was a stern, cold, and haughty man, unpopular at West Point fifteen years before, and scarcely less so in his subsequent career on the frontier. It was a well-known pet theory of his that officers should never be elevated from the ranks above a certain grade, and that the higher positions should invariably belong to graduates of the famous military school on the Hudson.

It is more than likely that he formed a prejudice against Private Osborne because he recognized in him a contradiction of his cherished belief—because he saw that the young recruit possessed the very qualities which would in time, and under favorable opportunities, lead to high promotion.

Be the reason what it may, the captain did dislike the lad, and Linn was thoroughly aware of this. It added to his discouragement to know that even should he be transferred to another troop—which was far from probable—there was no early prospect of winning promotion by showing what he could do on active service.

Close bordering Fort Sandiman on the north was the reservation of the Brule Sioux, with their crafty chief, Gray Fox. Not many miles to the southwest lay the Ogallalla Sioux reservation, the home of the famous and terrible Flying Thunder. But these Indians—formerly the pest of settler and soldier—had been at peace for some time; and that peace promised to be undisturbed, in spite of the usual and incessant rumors to the contrary.

So Linn's prospects were far from bright, and the shattering of his hopes gave him many an hour of wretchedness and heartache. But courage and pluck kept him from utter despair, and in the past weeks he had held fast to his ideals, faithfully and zealously performing the duties of his new life—the monotony of which was occasionally broken by a visit to the neighboring town of Chamberlain, or to Red Rock Agency on the Brule reservation.

He had written no word home to his father, nor did he intend to do so until the future had brightened, and he could feel satisfied that he had not made a mistake in choosing a military career. He was thinking of this and vowing never to return to Carlisle without an officer's

stripes, as he sat on the bench outside the sutler's store in the deepening gloom of the September evening. Presently the mention of a familiar name roused him from his reverie, and brought a look of keen interest to his face.

"I'm thinking we'll see some life before long, boys," said Corporal Otis. "I heard something on the quiet this afternoon. You know Flying Thunder demanded a big ransom for the loss of his son? Well, the Government don't intend to pay up a red cent, because Deerfoot had no business to steal the money and run away from the school. The old chief is said to be in a terrible rage. They sent him word yesterday."

"If that's the case look out fur squalls," remarked Jim Akers, one of the old scouts attached to the fort. "Flying Thunder is a bad Injun, an' he's been spoiling fur a row this long time. He'll need looking arter."

"Didn't they ever find Deerfoot's body?" Linn asked, eagerly.

"Nary a hair of it," replied the sutler. "You see, he fell down a hole in a cavern, and there was a stream of water at the bottom that swept him deeper underground. It's a pity, for he was as likely a young Indian as ever I seen. He's often been at the fort."

"I knew him well," declared Private Smith, "and I didn't think it was in him to turn thief."

"He was not a thief," exclaimed Linn. "He tried to run away all right enough, but he never stole the money."

"First time I've heard that stated," said Trumpeter Grant. "What do you know about it, youngster?"

"I—I come from the East, you know," stammered Linn, blushing with confusion, "and—and I have friends in Carlisle. Deerfoot had a reputation there for honesty."

"Mebbe you've been in Carlisle," said Corporal Otis. "Did you know Captain Cameron?"

"I've met him," Linn answered, wishing that the subject would be dropped.

"Cameron was a fine officer," said Sergeant Mull, "and I'd like to see him out here again. There's some talk of his being transferred from the East."

"I served under him at Fort Bennet," spoke up Private Reily. "Do you mind his son? I think the lad's name was Bruce. He was as full of wickedness as an egg is of meat. Bless me! he could have given you old rounders a few lessons!"

"The East knocked that out of him," replied the sutler. "I've heard that he's doing well now, and expects to enter West Point soon."

"I reckon it was more high spirits than sheer cussedness," added the corporal, "though it's a good thing they got him away from here; the frontier is a bad training school for a lad."

Linn felt that the conversation was taking a dangerous turn, and, though he was trying hard to suppress his emotion, he feared that something might betray him. He was heartily glad, therefore, when Sergeant Mull took his pipe from between his lips and said, slowly:

"Speaking of Flying Thunder, comrades—if the old chief chooses to make trouble, he'll likely find some one to help him brew it. This is the day Gray Fox comes back from Washington. He went there with half a dozen of his braves to ask the Great Father to give him more land and rations, and I heard the colonel say he'd been refused. He'll be pretty sore and disappointed about it."

"Yes, he comes on the evening train," said Ross, one of the company clerks, "and a lot of his people rode down to Chamberlain to meet him. The agent gave them permission to leave the reservation. Rather a foolish thing,

I should say. And Gray Fox's brother, Crooked Nose, is with the party."

"They won't be in any too good a humor when they hear the result of Gray Fox's visit," replied the sergeant.

"They had better have been kept on the reservation."

"By the way, that batch of new recruits are due to-day," said Ross. "They are timed to arrive at Chamberlain at six o'clock, and they ought to be here in an hour."

"You mean those fellows from Fort Gregg, down in Kansas?" grumbled Private Smith. "I hear they're a tough crowd—recruited during the last two months from different points in the Southwest. It's a pity we've got to have them."

"They go to the infantry," said the sergeant, "and Colonel Banks will soon lick them into shape. How many are there?"

"A hundred," replied Ross. "It will take just about that to fill out the regiment."

"And who's in charge?" asked the sutler.

"Lieutenant Somebody or other," Ross answered. "I didn't hear the name. We'll know pretty soon, when they come marching in. Hello! look there! What's up now?"

The loungers on the bench rose to their feet with one accord. The telegraph operator had just bolted out of his office, holding a yellow paper in one hand. He dashed across the parade-ground to the colonel's residence and vanished within.

A moment later the eagerly watching group saw Colonel Bromley and the operator hasten over to the officers' quarters.

"That means business," exclaimed Corporal Otis.

"There's a row somewhere," added Ross, "and I wish I was going to be in it."

"Look! here comes Lieutenant Coghill," cried Linn, in great excitement.

The young officer strode briskly up to the sutler's store, carrying himself with an importance worthy of the occasion.

"You fellows are wanted," he exclaimed. "Cut for equipments and mounts. Move lively; don't waste any time. Troop A is ordered out. Hark! there goes 'boots and saddles' now."

As he spoke a bugle rang sweetly over the parade-ground, and knots of blue-coated figures were seen hastening from all directions.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE TROOPERS FOUND.

Out through the main gate of the fort, past the saluting sentries, dashed Troop A—by long odds the finest and best disciplined troop of that regiment of horse, the Seventh Cavalry. Swiftly had the call to service been obeyed, and now the men went pounding rapidly over the plain in the direction of the town of Chamberlain, their repeating rifles and Colt's revolvers glistening under the starry sky.

"I wonder what's up?" said Linn, to himself. "A row with the Indians, most likely, from what I heard this evening. If this was another troop, or if it was commanded by any officer but Captain Norman, I might stand a chance of getting special mention—and that would mean promotion. But as things are now, I can't even hope. It's hard luck."

"Don't look so blue, Osborne," whispered Private Reily, who divined what was passing in the lad's mind. "There's a row ahead of us, and if you distinguish yourself it's the major or the colonel who will hear of it—in spite of Captain Norman."

"Do you think so?" said Linn, brightening up. "And what do you suppose is the trouble? Indians?"

"That's about it, Osborne," was the reply. "Not that it will be much of a row, though. Gray Fox has likely come home in a fit of anger, and he and his braves are trying to carry things with a high hand in the town. They'll wilt at the first sight of our blue-coats——"

"Gray Fox has nothing to do with the matter," interrupted the quiet voice of Sergeant Mull, who was riding close by. "His train is no more than due by this time. I saw the telegram just before we started."

"And what was it about?" asked Linn.

"It was from the town marshal, asking for help," replied the sergeant. "Those new recruits have broken out in a row, and are fighting drunk. The officer in charge can't control them."

"Is that all?" growled Private Reily. "Hanged if it ain't a shame to send Troop A on such dirty work!"

"I'd rather it was a row with Indians," said Linn, who was bitterly disappointed to learn the object of the expedition.

"And you may wish not before long," declared the sergeant. "If these chaps are what they're said to be, we'll have our hands full. I know the town marshal well, and he's not the man——"

"Less talking there in ranks!" called out Lieutenant Coghill, spurring his horse toward the rear of the column.

The admonition was obeyed, and in grim silence the troopers rode on over the plain.

Chamberlain, the terminus of a number of railroads, was only seven miles from Fort Sandiman. It was between eight and nine o'clock when the column rode over the Missouri bridge and entered the outskirts of the town. Plainly the trouble was not yet over. The deep hum of brawling voices mingled with the screech and rumble of a railway train slowing up at the end of the line.

When Captain Norman and his troopers clattered alongside the station, they found the platform crowded with Indians, all decked out in feathers and barbaric finery, and talking and gesticulating in sullen and angry tones.

Gray Fox and his brother, Crooked Nose, towered above the rest. It was evident that the Brule chief and his retinue of braves had returned from Washington in a bad humor, and without the customary gifts from the Great Father. It was evident, also, that they were now complaining freely to the score of tribesmen who had come to meet them. So intent were they on their own affairs that they paid no heed to the row in the town, or to the arrival of the cavalry.

Troop A rode on past the end of the station—where the Sioux had picketed their horses—and, turning a corner, found themselves at the top of the main street. Directly in front the way was blocked by groups of civilians—settlers, cowboys, and town people—who seemed to be doing nothing more than discussing the situation.

Further down the broad street, which was lined on both sides with low, wooden buildings, little knots of men—some in red shirts, and some in United States blue—were standing in quiet and peaceable attitudes under the glare of oil-lamps.

But the row and tumult, if hidden from sight, were to be heard plainly enough. From three or four of the low structures, whose windows blazed with light, proceeded shouting and yelling, angry curses, pounding and banging, and a noisy tinkle of breaking glass and crockery.

Captain Norman watched the scene for a moment in silent perplexity, and with a darkened brow. Then he urged his halted steed to a trot.

“Make way, there!” he called, sternly. “Forward, men! Clear the street.”

As the column moved on, the crowd parted, and some shouted loudly that the soldiers had arrived from the fort. The word spread, and there was a sudden forward advance from the lower part of the street. A burly, red-shirted man, with his right arm in a sling and a bloody

bandage around his forehead, ran out from one side, and called to Captain Norman.

"Halt!" cried the captain, checking his horse as he recognized Tom Benwood, the doughty town marshal of Chamberlain.

"What are you doing here, Benwood?" he added, angrily. "Is this the way you keep the peace?"

"Beggin' your pardon, but I've done my level best," returned the marshal. "I can hardly keep my feet now fur the dizzy pain in my head, where I got cracked by a flyin' bottle. An' I've got a bullet in my arm—it's my pistol arm, too. This is as ugly a crowd as ever I seen, an' they're running the town in spite of me."

"How did it begin?"

"It begun on the cars, sir, where the recruits must have had a lot of smuggled whisky," replied Benwood. "And as soon as ever the train pulled into the station the fellows out an' run fur more drinks, an' swarmed into Bill Jackson's saloon. They was purty near crazy drunk already, and when Bill refused 'em more they went fur him. He smashed one feller on the head with a beer mallet, and then skipped out the back door. The gang hunted him high an' low, vowin' to kill him, an' when they couldn't get trace of him they started to lay out the rest of the saloons——"

"Where's their officer?" interrupted Captain Norman.

"In hospital, with a broken head," said Benwood. "He was hit with a mug in Jackson's place. The crowd is at it as lively as ever yet, captain—barrin' a few sober heads who didn't take part one way or another. Hark! you kin hear 'em howling. There's some in Jackson's saloon, and some next door in Thompson's place; but the worst lot is across the street in Black Mike's dive. The ring-leader is with that party, an' if you knowed him as well as I do, you wouldn't care to tackle him. It's as much

as my life is worth to try to arrest him, seein' I'm so crippled up——"

"There's a ringleader, then?" demanded Captain Norman.

"Yes; Jack Harkness is at the bottom of it," said the marshal, "and it beats me how they ever come to enlist such a fellow. I knew him down in Texas fur a desperado an' cut-throat five years ago——"

"Jack Harkness!" exclaimed the captain. "Are you sure it's the same man? You can't be mistaken, you say? Well, he must have enlisted under a false name, and to escape punishment for some crime. I'm going to take him, dead or alive, and that ought to end the trouble."

"Be careful, captain," warned Benwood. "Harkness has two big pistols, an' the rest are more or less armed; they broke into Sansom's gun shop, an' helped themselves."

"There ain't much time to lose, captain," added a voice from the crowd. "If these drunken scoundrels find out that Gray Fox and his braves are up at the station they'll likely pitch into 'em out of sheer devilment. And then, look out!"

Captain Norman compressed his lips ominously as he leaped to the ground and gave the order to dismount. "Lieutenant Coghill," he added, "pick out ten of your best men at once. You will remain in charge here, Sergeant Mull. Block the way against the recruits, as they swarm out of the saloons, and let none get by you."

The orders were obeyed with military precision and speed. Scarcely a minute later the horses were huddled in a group, and the sergeant's men were drawn in line across the street from sidewalk to sidewalk. Lieutenant Coghill was as quick to choose the ten men, and, to his great delight, Linn found himself among the number.

On the quick-step, Captain Norman led his picked

troopers down the street, gathering in along the way the little knots of privates and non-commissioned officers belonging to the batch of unruly recruits who had not dared to either join their comrades or interfere with their drunken rioting. The crowd of town-people followed discreetly in the rear, wishing to share the fun without its attendant dangers.

The head of the procession came to a halt in the middle of the street, equi-distant from the saloons of Jackson and Thompson on the one side, and Black Mike's dive on the other. In both there were boisterous yelling and profanity, and from the latter there came suddenly a frenzied chorus of howls, followed by revolver shots and flying missiles.

Tom Benwood pushed up to Captain Norman's side.

"That's Harkness amusing himself," he said, as the din changed to laughter and brisk clatter of feet on hollow planking. "I hate to see you go in there, captain; you'll get the ruffian's first bullet. I'd go myself quick enough, if I had the use of this pistol arm. Better bring your whole force down here, sir, an' surround the place front and back—then you'll have the drop on 'em."

Captain Norman smiled grimly. With all his faults he was a brave and intrepid man, and the last one to shrink from doing his duty, no matter under what circumstances.

"Hush! no noise," he whispered, in reply to the marshal.

Then, with a gesture to the crowd to keep back, he stealthily crossed over to Black Mike's dive. His men followed, Linn among the foremost of them.

On the sidewalk the little group paused. The screen door of the saloon was closed, but one of the slats was missing, and through this aperture a fairly sweeping view of the interior of the dive could be had.

Black Mike was nowhere to be seen. The room was filled from wall to wall with tough-looking men in grimy blue shirts and trousers, some fighting, some wrapped in maudlin embrace, and all yelling and cursing at the top of their voices.

Three recruits were behind the bar, tearing down glasses and bottles of raw liquor from the shelves and tossing them at random into the crowd. Two others had forced open a keg of beer at one end of the counter, and were filling mugs and pannikins from the steadily running stream.

A tall giant of a man, with his evil and clean-shaven face bloated and flushed by drink and passion, was perched on top of the counter, dancing and capering from one end to the other. This was the terrible Jack Harkness, and he had a huge revolver in each hand. As he pranced about, he fired shot after shot into the ceiling, ripping out fearful oaths and defiantly calling on the whole United States army to come and take him.

"I'll take you soon enough, my man," muttered Captain Norman to himself, after watching the scene for a few seconds. Then he boldly pushed the screen door open and stepped into the dive. Lieutenant Coghill, Corporal Otis, and Private Osborne were the first to follow at his heels.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW GRAY FOX RESENTED A BLOW.

In spite of his drunken bombast and rantings, the desperado was quick as lightning to scent danger, and he saw the little group of strangers in cavalry blue and yellow the instant they entered the room. His capering feet stood still, out when both his arms, and two big Colt's revolvers stared the troopers in the face before one of them could lift a weapon.

"Stand right there, gentlemen," cried Harkness, with a savage oath. "Eyes to the front—hands down! I'll drop the first man that tries to raise a shooting-iron. That's dead right. I mean what I say."

Evidently he did mean it, and he had the drop on the troopers. Not one of them stirred, and those entering from behind paused on the threshold, understanding the situation at a glance. With folded arms Captain Norman gazed straight and sternly at the ruffian. There was no sign of fear on his face, but he well knew that the lifting of a weapon by himself or one of his men would mean instant death.

The other occupants of the room were of different metal from Harkness. As soon as they caught sight of the captain and his men they realized the enormity of what they had done, and the possible consequences that would follow. The shock partly sobered them, and it was ludicrous to see their expressions change.

The shower of bottles and glasses from behind the bar

ceased, and the stream of beer flowed unheeded from the keg, and trickled over the floor. Some of the recruits dodged under the counter, others edged toward the door, and a deep silence fell on all.

"If it's a drink you want, gentlemen, why you're quite welcome," the desperado went on, his tone growing more ugly and sneering. "What'll you have? Comrades, fill up the glasses fur the visitors."

"Don't trouble yourself," said Captain Norman, in a loud, clear voice. "It's you I want. Lower those weapons, my man, and come down here and surrender."

The ruffian laughed and swore in one breath, and his big teeth showed between his parted lips. His relaxing arms stiffened out, and the two Colt's revolvers covered the troopers with a more deadly aim than ever.

"Your game is up," the captain added. "You know my authority, and you know I'm not a man to be trifled with. I've got a troop of cavalry here to back me up. Are you coming down?"

"No," yelled the desperado. "I dare you to come and take me. I don't care a darn for Uncle Sam's whole army as long as I've got a shot left. Fur half a cent, I'd knock them buttons off your uniform, captain, an' rip them bars off your shoulder——"

"Drop that, old man," interrupted one of the recruits. "It's just as the cap'n says. The game's up, an' you can't do better'n surrender."

"Shay, that's dead right," exclaimed another, in maudlin tones. "Stow your shootin'-irons an' come down. It's no use to buck ag'in Uncle Sam."

"You skulkin' cowards!" snarled the ruffian. "Is this the way you go back on a comrade? I'm running this shebang, and I won't stand no monkey business. If you an' your men don't like my company, captain, why you

can slide out purty quick. If you want to be sociable an' take a drink with me, you can stay."

During this brief speech, half a dozen of the recruits lurched stealthily out of the door, unchecked by the troopers standing there at bay. In the confusion a daring thought flashed into Linn's mind, and on the spur of the moment he dropped to the floor, unseen by the sharp eyes of Harkness.

Corporal Otis detected the move, and evidently mistook it for a cowardly desire to get out of danger, for he gave the lad an admonitory kick on the hind quarters. Linn suffered this to pass unnoticed, and on his hands and knees he crept over the floor in the direction of the counter, squirming like a snake between the legs of the thickly massed recruits, and momentarily expecting to be discovered and shot.

But the desperado had eyes only for the little knot of motionless troopers, nor did he detect that one was missing. His hands shook slightly as he kept the two big revolvers pointed. Drink and passion were telling on him, and were fast destroying what atom of prudence remained in his brain. He was working himself into a mood of ungovernable fury and bloodthirstiness.

"What are you goin' to do about it, captain?" he burst out, with a string of profanity. "I'm tired of foolin' with you an' your Government slaves. Right about face, there! Now, march through that door. Quick, or I'll let these triggers slip."

Not a trooper stirred, but more than one hand tightened unseen on the butt of a revolver. Captain Norman leaned slightly forward, his bronzed face pale but resolute.

"This farce has been going on too long," he said, sternly, "and it has got to end. For the last time I command

you to surrender. You know what will be the consequences if you dare to fire on me or my men, Jack Harkness——”

The name had slipped out unaware, for the captain had no intention of admitting that he knew the desperado's past title and record. But the mischief was done now without recall. A rush of hot blood turned Harkness' face purple, and he gritted his teeth; a deadly fury shone from his bloodshot eyes, and there was also something of fear and terror in his glance.

“That seals your fate!” he cried, with a horrible oath. “If the game's up for me, captain, it's up for you, too. Here goes for your heart, and Jack Harkness never misses his aim.”

With a diabolical grin on his face, the ruffian pointed one of the big revolvers at Captain Norman's breast, purposely delaying to pull the trigger that he might enjoy his victim's suspense a little longer. The crowd in the room were hushed and awe-stricken, and not a man interfered by word or deed. With trembling hands, Corporal Otis dived for his pistol, but it was caught on the buckle of his belt, which had shifted around to one side.

With a howl of drunken rage the desperado pulled the trigger, but just at that fateful instant Linn sprang to his feet directly in front of the counter. With both hands he grabbed the maddened man by the ankles, and jerked on them with all his strength.

Bang! went the big revolver in the air, and over and backward went Harkness, landing out of sight, and with a tremendous crash, behind the counter. Amid the cheers and shouts that greeted this daring act, a prudent desire to escape must have penetrated the ruffian's stupefied brain, for an instant later he rose to view at an open door which led to a rear apartment from the corner of the bar.

Bang! bang! bang! three shots roared and flashed, all aimed so recklessly that the bullets found lodgment high on the opposite wall. For a fleeting second Jack Harkness' bloated face, insane with rage and intoxication, glared through the curling smoke. Then he was gone, banging the door shut, and floundering with booted feet amid the wreck of chairs and tables in the adjoining apartment.

"After him, men!" roared Captain Norman, as he dashed forward with drawn revolvers. "Don't let the ruffian escape. Take him dead or alive! There is a price on his head in three States!"

Those of Troop A who were outside and on the threshold had surged into the room at the first shot, and now the drunken and thoroughly cowed recruits were flung right and left as the little band of cavalymen plowed across the floor in a blue and yellow wave.

Right over the bar vaulted Captain Norman, Linn, and Corporal Otis, with their comrades at their heels. Crash! down went the door, and into the dark room beyond tumbled the whole party. They stampeded through it with reckless haste, tumbled out the door at the farther end, cleared the yard in flying leaps, bore down the rickety board fence, and found themselves in a narrow thoroughfare that ran parallel with the main street of the town.

"There he goes!" gasped Captain Norman, pointing to a flying figure some sixty feet distant. "Run your best, men! We must have him dead or alive!"

The flying figure was Jack Harkness, and he was running up the street with great strides in the direction of the railway station. The roar of the chase came to his ears, and he glanced over his shoulder with a jeering howl. As he ran on he fired three shots at his pursuers, but all went wide of the mark.

The troopers did not return the fire, but sped on fleetly, confident of overtaking the ruffian ere long. At the corner of the first cross street they were joined by Tom Benwood and a half a dozen others, who had circled around from the front of the saloon, and they all rushed on together.

The fleeing desperado lost a little in the next half-minute, but when he vanished from sight at the top of the street his pursuers were still forty feet behind. An instant later the troopers swept around the corner in time to witness a daring and thrilling sight.

Harkness had already reached the end of the station, where the Sioux horses were fastened. The Indians were still grouped on the platform, their attention as yet riveted on the bunch of troopers who had just appeared in sight.

Slipping his pair of revolvers into his belt, the fugitive caught the nearest horse by the bridle, and by a strong jerk broke the detaining lariat. At that instant Gray Fox himself leaped off the platform and sprang with a threatening gesture in front of the intruder.

With a drunken howl and a curse, Harkness struck the Brule chief a terrific fist blow in the face, sending him heavily and full length to the ground. Then he sprang into the saddle of the stolen horse, and spurred madly down the street in the direction of the Missouri.

It was all done and over so quickly that the troopers could not reach the spot in time to interfere. Now, when they would have fired after the fleeing ruffian, their aim was barred by the whole band of Indians, who came jumping and scrambling off the platform, and surged around Gray Fox just as he rose to his feet.

In the confusion that followed the little handful of troopers were powerless. With a maddened yelling and screaming all but one or two of the Sioux rushed for

their steeds, untied them, and scrambled into the saddle. Led by Gray Fox himself, the whole band of braves clattered noisily and with frenzied shouting down the street, bent on wreaking vengeance on the white desperado who had struck their beloved chief and stolen a horse.

CHAPTER XV.

A DOUBLE CHASE.

With his breathless and perspiring troopers clustered around him, Captain Norman stood gazing after the vanishing braves.

"Heavens, this is awful!" he groaned. "The Sioux were in a bad enough temper as it was; and now that the chief has been knocked down by the desperado, they will be ripe for any devilment. Why, this night's work may lead to a general outbreak."

"Right you are, captain," cried Tom Benwood, "and the worst of it is that Harkness will shoot some of the redskins if he is brought to bay. You see he's crazy drunk——"

"If murder is done, there will be no stopping the row," interrupted Lieutenant Coghill. "It is important to lose no time, captain——"

"No, every moment is precious," exclaimed Captain Norman. "Take those men, lieutenant, and go in pursuit at once. Don't spare your horses. Pass the Indians, if you can, and capture Harkness at all hazards. I trust everything to your judgment. Remember that this is a grave crisis."

"I know it," replied the lieutenant. "I will do my best, sir."

"I can't go with you," added Captain Norman, "and I can't spare any more men. I must discipline these unruly recruits before they break out again, and get them started to the fort. I will push after you later, if possible——"

Already the young officer had saluted, and was off on the run, followed by his men. They pushed through the crowd of excited recruits and town people, quickly reached the horses, and swung themselves into the saddle.

It was all done in brief time, and ere the Indians had gained much of a start the little cavalry detachment was past the railway station and in full gallop out of the town. The force numbered just a dozen, Trumpeter Grant having been added at the last moment.

They thundered across the Missouri bridge, and went pounding with muffled clatter over the soft and moonlit sage plain. At a considerable distance straight ahead a dark body of horsemen were visible, but, as yet, thank God! no pistol shots had roused the slumbering echoes of the night.

The desperado was evidently keeping well in the lead, and the direction in which he was fleeing—to the southwest—seemed to indicate that he counted on finding shelter along the woody banks of Bull Creek.

The men of Troop A were splendidly mounted, but the under-sized Indian ponies were quite the equal in speed and endurance of the Government steeds. So, when the chase had lasted for three miles, pursuers and pursued were separated by about the same distance as at the start.

The Sioux galloped on in a compact line, and with no more noise than the patter of their horses' hoofs. Doggedly behind pounded the troopers, Lieutenant Coghill riding slightly in advance, his ears on the alert, and his eyes scanning the horizon.

The young officer, as well as each one of his men, realized to the full the gravity of the situation. They understood that it rested with them to nip in the bud what might prove to be a long and bloody Indian outbreak, and they also knew how slight a chance of success they had.

These dismal forebodings weighed less on Linn than on

his comrades. This was the lad's first opportunity of active service, and now that he found himself face to face with what he had ardently and hopelessly longed for, the lad felt a strange sense of elation and joy. He was justly proud of what he had already accomplished—though modestly not rating it as high as it deserved—and he fancied that another plucky feat might win for him the coveted grade of a non-commissioned officer. And that would be the first step in the career he had vowed to achieve.

"Do you think we are going to have a scrimmage, sir?" he asked, with undisguised eagerness, of Corporal Otis.

"God forbid, lad," was the reply. "But there's no telling what may happen. If Harkness gets into a row with the Indians we're bound by our duty to rescue him, and in that case the bullets will fly. This is one of them aggravatin' situations that crop out on the frontier from time to time."

The corporal paused long enough to extract a plug of tobacco from his pocket and bite off a huge chunk.

"If the Sioux can only kill the ruffian before he shoots any of them," he added, "why, that will wind up the scrape to a finish, and in a way that will satisfy all hands. But it ain't likely."

"Not a bit of it," chimed in the trumpeter. "Harkness will fight to the death. If we only dared leave him to his fate! But there's the rub! It's our duty to get hold of him and turn him over to Uncle Sam for his deserts."

"If it comes to a scrimmage, I'll warrant you'll be cool enough, Osborne," said Private Reily, in a low and rather envious tone. "You've got the right stuff in you. I never saw a neater thing than you did to-night—ay, or a pluckier one."

"Thanks," replied Linn. "Really, I don't think so much of it, though. It was easy enough to creep across

the floor, and once I got my grip on Harkness he had to drop."

"It was something that didn't occur to the rest of us," said Reily, "and that only one man in a thousand would have thought of. Major Dallas will hear of it, and then you're sure to get your grade in spite of the captain——"

"In spite of Captain Norman?" Linn interrupted, sharply. "Why, I saved his life. Harkness was just going to fire at him——"

"I know that, Osborne. But I was watching Captain Norman, and he actually bit his lip and looked vexed when you jerked Harkness off his feet. It's no use hashing over the old story. You and I understand it, and so do half the men of the troop. Captain Norman has vowed to keep you in the ranks, and now that you're in a fair way to rise he'll dislike you more than ever, even though he knows that you saved his life.

"It sounds queer, but it's just as I tell you. The captain is a splendid soldier, and a fair and square man until his private purposes are crossed. Then he's a good hater, and a crafty one. And he sees in you a contradiction of his pet hobby. Once in the ranks, always in the ranks—that's his theory. This time you'll get your grade in spite of him, but look out for the future, and keep your eyes open. Take my advice—I mean it well."

"I know you do," Linn said, gratefully. "You're a good fellow, Reily, and I promise you I'll be on my guard. But I can scarcely believe that Captain Norman will——"

Bang! the dull report of a revolver rang on the night air, breaking off the conversation between Privates Osborne and Reily, and making the heart of every man in the detachment leap with excitement and alarm. All eyes peered forward, and the Indians were seen to spread out in a long and broken skirmish line, and then to check their galloping steeds to a rapid trot.

Bang! bang! two more shots followed in quick succession, and a moment later came a third.

"No mistaking that," cried Corporal Otis. "They're gaining on Harkness, and he's peppering away at them from the saddle. So far his aim's been bad, for there ain't a redskin down——"

"They want to take him alive and torture him," added Jones, the second sergeant of Troop A; "that's why they don't fire back."

"We must prevent bloodshed if possible," shouted Lieutenant Coghill. "We may be in time yet. Forward, men! Close up! Charge!"

In a single line the troopers galloped on, gaining splendidly at the first wild spurt. Nearer and nearer they drew to the scattered column of Sioux. Now they were only twenty yards in the rear, and a moment more would take them flying past, and place them between Harkness and his pursuers.

But just then a red flash blazed out of the gloom ahead, and with the crack of the desperate ruffian's pistol one of the Indians tossed up his arms and pitched head first out of the saddle. His riderless steed swerved to the left, and went flying over the plain.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CRITICAL SITUATION.

The effect of Harkness' shot was seen by all the Indians, and the moment that the stricken Sioux pitched to the ground a wild yell of vengeance rose on the air. The greater part of the braves dashed on in pursuit of the desperado, but half a dozen pulled up their steeds and rode back to where their comrade had fallen.

An instant later the troopers came galloping to the spot, and halted abruptly. With a pallid face Lieutenant Coghill swung himself from the saddle, and fearlessly pushed his way into the little group of dismounted Indians. He gave one quick glance, and then turned toward his men.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, "this is far worse than I thought."

No words were needed to tell what he meant. Prone on the ground, with his grim face staring up at the moonlit sky, lay Crooked Nose, the brother of the Brule chief. He was stone dead—shot through the heart by the heavy pistol bullet.

A shuddering silence fell on the troopers as they realized the consequences of this murderous deed. Gray Fox had been the first to turn back after the shot, and to crouch beside the body. Now he stood up, wringing his hands, and uttering shrill and wailing cries. The other Sioux joined in, and the dismal sound echoed far on the night air.

The presence of the soldiers was unheeded. The old chief's face worked convulsively with grief and rage as

he poured out a torrent of lamentation for his dead brother, and called down vengeance on the assassin. He spoke in the Dakota tongue, but his utterances were understood by the lieutenant and several of his men.

The thrilling scene lasted but a short time, and was brought suddenly to a close. With a few muttered words Gray Fox leaped into the saddle and dashed off in the direction of the pursuit, followed by three of his companions; two Indians remained with the body of Crooked Nose.

Anticipating this move, the lieutenant mounted with equal swiftness, and as the word rang from his lips the troopers went galloping forward. For half a mile they hung pretty closely to the rear of the Indians, though losing gradually in spite of all they could do. Meanwhile shot after shot was ringing above the muffled pounding of hoofs, telling of lively but invisible work going on in front.

A distance of thirty yards separated the two parties as they rode over a gentle ridge of ground, and from the crest a clear view of the scene of action burst suddenly upon their vision.

A quarter of a mile away, in a clump of trees that fringed the shore of Bull Creek, stood a deserted and half-ruined log cabin—once the home of some settler or prospector. Here Harkness had taken refuge. His horse lay dead some distance in front of the doorway, and from the dark shelter of the cabin his revolvers were flashing and cracking at brief intervals.

The besiegers were as much at bay as Harkness himself. With a wholesome respect for the ruffian's aim and weapons, the score of Sioux braves were riding to and fro in a half-circle, at a distance of several hundred feet, yelling at the top of their voices, and firing shot after shot at the cabin.

As soon as Gray Fox and his companions rode over the ridge and saw what was going on, they jerked their horses sharply around and faced the little squad of troopers.

"Go back! go back!" the chief yelled, passionately, shaking his rifle in one muscular hand. "Leave us to deal with the slayer of Crooked Nose. My brother's blood calls for vengeance."

Lieutenant Coghill heard and understood, for he was fairly well versed in the Dakota tongue. He did not hesitate a second, nor did he slacken speed.

"Get out of the way, Gray Fox," he cried. "Call your braves off, and return to the reservation. Justice shall be done to the murderer."

A shiny revolver stared the Brule chief in the face, and added emphasis to the command. With a scowl and an imprecation, he swerved his pony to one side out of the path, an example that was followed quickly by his companions.

"Now for the cabin!" shouted the young officer, as he led his men down the slope at a furious gallop. "We'll have our hands full to capture the fellow and prevent more bloodshed, but it's got to be done."

The rapid advance of the troopers took the scattered line of Sioux unawares, and, not having Gray Fox at hand to counsel them, they were unable to make up their minds what to do at the moment. So they sullenly opened a wide gap in the centre, and allowed the lieutenant and his squad to ride past them unmolested.

"Harkness hasn't fired a shot for half a minute," cried Trumpeter Grant. "I reckon he's had enough, and will surrender like a baby. But he may take us for Indians in this dim light. Shall I give him a signal, sir?"

"Yes, go ahead," said the lieutenant, who thought this a wise suggestion.

The trumpeter raised the bugle to his lips, and as the

first note floated sweetly on the air, two shots rang almost simultaneously from the front wall of the cabin, which was now but sixty feet distant.

Lieutenant Coghill's steed went down in a quivering heap, flinging its rider heavily to the ground. At the same instant Corporal Otis gave a shrill cry, clapped one hand to his breast, and dropped like a log from the saddle.

In less time than it takes to tell, the troopers had dismounted, each man holding his horse, and were bending anxiously over their fallen comrades. Loud cries of anger and horror blended with the ferocious yells of the Sioux. Corporal Otis had been shot through the chest, and was just breathing his last. Lieutenant Coghill lay bleeding and unconscious on the sod, his right arm broken and his forehead gashed by a sharp stone.

For a moment the near presence of the Indians was forgotten. Carbines were hastily unslung, and a hoarse demand for vengeance rose from every lip. But just then Harkness came tottering to the cabin door. His face showed pale in the moonlight, and he was evidently quite sober now.

"I didn't mean to do it!" he gasped. "Before God, I didn't! I took you fellows fur Injuns, an' I fired to save my life——"

There was a mad rush, and Harkness was knocked down in a trice and stripped of his fatal weapons. Some were savage enough to kill him on the spot, but wiser counsels prevailed, and his arms were secured behind his back.

"I tell you I didn't mean to do it," protested the cowed and shivering wretch, in a shrill voice that was heard above the curses and threats of his captors. "It was a mistake, and they can't hang a man fur that, can they?"

I own up to shooting an Injun. I had to do it in self-fense, fur it was my life or theirs——

"Here they come," he added, in a terror-stricken wail. "They're after me. For Heaven's sake, save me, boys! Don't let the red devils take me—they'll kill me by inches. And you darsen't give me up. You're bound by oath to protect me."

The Sioux were coming, sure enough. The main body had ridden back to confer with Gray Fox, and now they were all advancing from the foot of the ridge, riding slowly and silently in a compact line.

With Corporal Otis dead, and the lieutenant unconscious, the command devolved on Second Sergeant Jones. But that officer had fairly lost his head, and was in no fit condition to assume the responsibility.

"They're coming to demand the prisoner," he groaned, "and I don't see anything for it but to give him up. If we refuse we'll likely be butchered to a man."

"We've got to refuse," cried Private Reily. "It's our duty to hold the prisoner at all hazards, much as he deserves to be handed over for torture."

"That's the talk," shouted another. "Duty first, my boys. We're in a tight place, but pluck will pull us through. There are thirty of the Sioux, and we number just ten. Three redskins to one of Uncle Sam's men ain't bad odds. And we have a strong position——"

"They'll soon be here," interrupted Linn. "Let's get ready."

This sound advice was acted upon at once. Finding that the second sergeant was not to be depended upon, the men took matters into their own hands. No retreat was possible, for the Sioux were in front, and behind flowed the deep and swift tide of Bull Creek.

The horses were hurriedly staked in the shelter of the trees, and the fettered desperado was hidden from sight

in a far corner of the cabin, and commanded to make no noise at peril of his life. The dead corporal and the senseless body of the lieutenant were also brought into the cabin.

Then the troopers clustered just outside the doorway, waiting with drawn carbines for the issue of the expected conference. Sergeant Jones, pale and shaky, stood a little in front with the trumpeter. Grant knew the Dakota tongue, and was often employed as an interpreter.

But brief time had been wasted in the preparations, and now the long and sullen line of Sioux was within two hundred feet. An instant later they halted, and Gray Fox detached himself from the rest. He rode forward to within ten feet of the cabin, and sharply reined up his pony.

The fierce and haughty old Brule chief made an imposing figure as he sat astride the saddle, with the moonlight glistening on his bronzed features, on his fringed buckskin breeches and crimson sash, on his bright-colored blanket and trailing head-dress of eagles' feathers and herons' plumes.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CONFERENCE AND AN ATTACK.

"My brother, Crooked Nose, has been slain by the white ruffian who wears the blue of your army," began the chief, in a loud voice, and addressing himself to Sergeant Jones. "His blood calls aloud for vengeance, and Gray Fox must heed the cry. My people have done no wrong, and we did not make the trouble. The soldiers of the Great Father must deliver up the murderer for punishment. I have spoken."

The chief paused for the reply, but it was not at once forthcoming. He sat upright in his saddle like a bronze statue, and the line of braves behind him waited in ominous silence.

Sergeant Jones was not able to cope with the situation. His grade had been won by steady attention to duties, and until now he had never been confronted by danger or responsibility. His lips and cheeks turned white, and his watery blue eyes stared helplessly at the grim little handful of troopers.

"I—I don't know what to do," he stammered. "It ain't fair that the decision should rest on me. If we refuse to give Harkness up, we'll be killed and scalped to a man. I'd rather turn him over, and face the music afterward."

"Coward!" hissed a couple of low voices from the rear.

The sergeant wheeled around angrily, and swore under his breath.

"I'm talking for your own good," he growled, "and you're too dumb to know it. One of you fellows go and

see if the lieutenant has come to his senses yet. What he says will settle the matter——”

“Gray Fox is waiting for an answer,” broke in the chief, sternly and impatiently.

“He must have it right away,” muttered Private Reily, as the trumpeter interpreted the words. “The sergeant has lost his head men, and we’ve got to act for him. It’s plain as daylight what our duty is. We must stick to it, cost what it may.”

As he spoke the trooper pushed forward alongside of Grant, and Sergeant Jones took advantage of the opportunity to slide back to the door of the cabin.

“Now for it,” said Reily. “This is the answer, Grant; don’t miss a word. Tell the chief that the Great Father will punish the murderer as he deserves, but that we can on no account deliver him up. And warn him that he and his braves had better go quietly back to the reservation.”

The trumpeter delivered the message word for word, and Gray Fox listened intently. Then the chief rode a little closer, jerked his pony back on its haunches, and brandished his rifle defiantly.

“My people must have the murderer,” he thundered. “We will deal with him in our own way. We know what the justice of the Great Father is, and we have no faith in his promises. It is our right to punish. We have done no wrong, nor did we make this trouble. The white ruffian dared to strike Gray Fox, and to steal one of our horses. He cowardly shot down my brother, Crooked Nose, and his life shall pay for it. He must be given up at once, and unless the soldiers of the Great Father do this my braves will leave not one alive. I have spoken.”

The trumpeter interpreted this speech, and the troopers received it without comment, though every man realized that the crisis was at hand.

"I reckon Gray Fox means business," said Reily, "but so do we, for that matter. Tell the chief he can't have Harkness. Tell him we admit that he and his people have been deeply wronged, but that the Great Father will deal with the murderer, and punish him to the full. Give him to understand that if he attempts any violence, he and his tribe will be wiped off the earth, and tell him this is our last word.

"I think that will settle the old codger," Reily added to his companions, as the trumpeter began to translate the speech. "It's a bold bluff, and the chief will think twice before he bucks against Uncle Sam. But there's no telling what he'll do. Be ready to get under cover, men, if it comes to the worst."

A moment later the defiant reply had been delivered word for word, and as the trumpeter ended a breathless silence fell. For a few seconds Gray Fox sat like a rock. Then, without deigning to answer, he suddenly wheeled his pony around and dashed in a half-circle back to his braves, stopping again with his face to the troopers.

"What does that mean?" exclaimed Linn. "Are they going to——"

"Whoop!" Gray Fox's voice rang loud and shrill, and up went his right arm as a signal.

That quickly there was an answering burst of yells, and forward on a gallop came the whole line of Sioux—a seething mass of plunging hoofs and gleaming weapons, bronzed faces and fluttering blankets and plumes.

"They mean murder—take shelter and be ready," cried Private Reily, his voice mingling with a howl of fright from Harkness and the crack of Indian rifles.

In a trice the troopers had swarmed into the cabin, bullets pattering around them as they went. They dropped down right and left of the doorway, and each

man hurriedly thrust his carbine out at the gaping cracks between the rotten logs.

"If they carry the place it's all up with us," shouted Reily. "We must stand them off—it's that or death."

But he hesitated to give the order to fire, knowing that it meant a grave responsibility, and might lead to a court-martial. And Sergeant Jones, the actual commander of the squad, was groveling in fright upon the moldy floor.

Linn was wild with excitement, and when a man by his side was shot in the arm, and leaped half up with the pain, the lad could keep silence no longer.

"Here they come!" he cried, as the yelling savages loomed close in the moonlight, and the bullets pattered more thickly on the logs. "Let them have it, men! Aim well——"

The bang of Linn's carbine was simultaneous with a volley from the whole squad. Again the troopers fired, and with a cool and deadly aim. It was more than the Sioux could stand. As the smoke lifted a cheering sight—and yet a terrible one—was seen. Half a dozen Indians and ponies were kicking on the sward, and Gray Fox and his remaining braves were scurrying right and left away from the cabin.

"This ain't my doing," cried Sergeant Jones, "and I won't take the blame; remember that——"

"Shut up!" growled Reily, with an angry disregard of the other's rank. "They'll be back again presently, men," he added. "Be ready."

It looked so, for the baffled Sioux had swung around in two opposite half-circles, and were forming up near the foot of the slope, their faces toward the troopers. But of a sudden they were off on a mad gallop to the left, yelling like fiends, and brandishing their rifles in the direction of the cabin.

The meaning of this unexpected flight was quickly seen.

As the tail end of the Indians vanished in the gloom that shrouded the plain the muffled clatter of hoofs were heard from straight in front, and over the crest of the ridge came a body of cavalry.

Three minutes later Captain Norman and twenty troopers reached the cabin, to find Corporal Otis dead, Private Mullins shot in the arm, the young lieutenant still unconscious, and four lifeless Indians sprawled on the plain. The party had hurried forward as quickly as possible, after starting the batch of recruits to Fort Sandiman under a small escort. The body of Crooked Nose must have been taken off by his friends, since the troopers had seen nothing of him on the way.

With a grave and troubled face, Captain Norman listened to the thrilling story, and when it was told he could hardly restrain his anger. "This is a terrible night's work," he exclaimed, "and I don't see where it is going to end. The Sioux will hardly stay on their reservation now. The Brules will likely take the warpath, and the Ogallallas as well; Gray Fox will find a ready ally in Flying Thunder. You will probably find yourself reduced to the ranks for cowardice, Sergeant Jones. And you, Osborne, admit to firing the first shot. Well, an investigation will put the blame where it belongs. I fear we are on the eve of a bloody outbreak.

"We must be off to the fort at once," the captain went on. "There is much to be done, and not a moment to lose. I will ride forward with half the troop, and the rest will follow as soon as possible. Take good care of Lieutenant Coghill, and don't let Harkness give you the slip. Bring the corporal's body, but leave the dead Indians here for the present."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SUMMONS FROM THE COLONEL.

Fort Sandiman was in a state of thrilling excitement and suspense during the next few days, and the old veterans of the post were strongly reminded of the terrible times that followed the massacre of Custer and his little army.

Prospective hops and gayeties of all kinds were abandoned; the wives and children wore strained and anxious faces as they thought of the perils into which their dear ones might soon be plunged; the officers sat in grave council, and clerks and adjutants had scarcely time to sleep; the telegraph wires were kept humming, and night and day communication was maintained with Washington, department headquarters at Omaha, and the neighboring forts and agencies; officers and men off on leave were recalled, and every train from the East brought in one or two of the stragglers.

The messages that were brought into the fort by trusty scouts and couriers, and then wired on to Washington, were by no means reassuring. The Brules were still on their reservation, and not a brave had showed his face at Red Rock agency. Crooked Nose and his slain tribesmen had been buried with much lamentation and ceremony, and now it was reported that Gray Fox was holding councils and encouraging war dances, and that the lodges, tepees, and squaws were ready to be moved at a moment's notice.

Down on the Ogallalla reservation, where the famous

Flying Thunder ruled hundreds of hot-blooded warriors, the situation was fully as ominous. The old chief was more angry and sullen than ever because of the loss of his son and the cavalier treatment he had received from the Government, and it was said that he was in constant communication with Gray Fox. Nor was this the worst. A defiant and threatening attitude had suddenly developed on all the other reservations, far and near, of the mighty clan of Sioux—among the Minneconjou and Uncapapa, the Santee and Blackfoot.

Experienced officers and men alike read these signs correctly, and predicted a general and speedy outbreak, and one that would be hard to quell. Special significance was added to the situation by the fact that Flying Thunder had suddenly ended his appeals to the Government, and that Gray Fox had neither made any further demands for the surrender of Harkness nor lodged complaint for the death of his brother and the four braves.

So matters stood at the end of a week, and of all that had happened in the interval Private Osborne had been kept informed by his kindly disposed jailers. For, sad to relate, Linn had been thrown into the guard-house on the morning after his return to the fort, charges having been preferred against him by Captain Norman.

And there the lad still languished, in solitude and mental suffering. He felt bitterly the injustice of his treatment, but he had little hope of being vindicated and righted. The ambitious career he had marked out for himself seemed to have crumbled to ashes, and now, with the show of disgrace and punishment hanging over him, he felt that the future was not worth living for. It was terribly hard, coming just at a time when opportunities for promotion and active service promised to be so plentiful.

Linn had plenty of sympathizing friends, but in the

daily rush of drill and preparation they did not find much time to think of him, or of what other things happened within the confines of the fort.

Sergeant Jones was confined in a neighboring cell of the guard-house, waiting to be tried on charges of cowardice and failure of duty. The desperado and murderer, Harkness, who was at the bottom of all the trouble, was in the same dismal place, heavily ironed and closely watched. He had nothing to hope for. Trial and conviction were certain, and the shadow of a military execution—a file of grim soldiers with rifles trained on his breast—loomed darkly over him.

Private Mullins was up and about with his arm in a sling, and Lieutenant Coghill was slowly convalescing in the hospital, his right arm broken in two places, and his skull slightly fractured. The band had played the last honors for Corporal Otis, and the poor fellow was at rest in the little cemetery on the bluff of the Missouri.

In the face of the threatened Indian outbreak, when every man was needed, the new recruits had been pardoned for their breach of discipline, and their officers were working hard to lick them into shape. The young officer who had accompanied the batch from the Southwest had been removed from Chamberlain to the fort, suffering with a badly bruised head. But he had now almost recovered, and it was said that he was to fill temporarily the vacancy created by Lieutenant Coghill.

Linn's arrest, though he did not know this, was merely preliminary to holding him for court-martial. It was due to Captain Norman's personal dislike to the lad, or rather, as that officer expressed it, "to his imperative sense of duty."

So at the end of the week, when there was a lull in the alarming tidings from the reservations, the tardy inquiry into the history of that eventful night at Chamberlain

was held in the colonel's office. There were present Colonel Bromley, Major Dallas, Captain Norman, Sergeant Jones, and a number of the men of Troop A, including Private Osborne.

Of course, the whole story came out, and as the investigation proceeded Linn's spirits rose. The lad's plucky feat in Black Mike's saloon was graphically told by his friends, and the narrative brought wonder and admiration to the faces of the major and colonel, as well as a look that was far from being to Captain Norman's taste.

Knowing the evidence that would be arrayed against him, Sergeant Jones wisely concluded to make a clean breast of it, and his confession showed that the little handful of troopers had been left to their own resources and judgment to grapple with a deadly peril and a grave responsibility.

"The question at issue is, were the men warranted in firing?" commented Colonel Bromley. "And I am satisfied that they were. It was their duty to protect Harkness and themselves, and as the Indians plainly meant murder, the shooting is fully justified by the circumstances. It is a most unfortunate affair, and in my opinion the burden of blame rests entirely on Harkness. The conduct of Sergeant Jones is a side issue, and his case must be held over for court-martial.

"I see no reason for holding Private Osborne," the colonel went on. "In fact, I consider his arrest unwarranted. The evidence shows that he displayed unusual courage and presence of mind, and he deserves commendation. He is therefore fully vindicated and discharged."

This was a palpable rebuke to Captain Norman, and that officer could not fail to see it. The investigation now being over, he marched stiffly from the room, after first darting a keen glance at Private Osborne.

Linn did not observe this, though he recognized that in future he must exercise double caution and vigilance. He was too happy at the outcome of the investigation to let the captain's enmity weigh heavily upon his spirits; and after a few complimentary words from the colonel and the major, he hurried off to his quarters, where his jubilant comrades received him with hearty cheers and congratulations. And more than one predicted a reward in the near future, thereby making the lad's cheeks burn, and his heart glow with pride and hope. It was a glorious ending to a most wretched day.

On the following morning there was an unexpected change in the situation. From the Red Rock agency on the Brule reservation Gray Fox sent, by the mouth of the agent, a defiant message to Colonel Bromley, demanding that the murderer of Crooked Nose should be surrendered to the Sioux within forty-eight hours.

At the same time, and from the agent of the Ogallalla reservation, came a somewhat similar message from Flying Thunder—a demand that his claims against the Great Father in the case of Deerfoot should be recognized, and within the same space of time, forty-eight hours. In the opinion of the officers, this showed concerted action on the part of the two formidable chiefs, and it was confidently expected that in case the demands were refused immediate trouble would ensue.

It was utterly out of the question, of course, that the Government would yield to either demand, nor was it likely that the chiefs expected favorable replies. It was evident to those in the fort that the crisis was at hand. Messengers went and came, wires hummed in all directions, and the post commander and his staff—who alone held the key to the situation—grew haggard with worry and anxiety.

The two days of grace came and passed, and the morn-

ing of the third day dawned as calmly as its predecessors. A deep and ominous silence brooded over the fort. Women and children remained tearfully within doors, and before the quarters little groups of men talked in low tones. Scouts and couriers glided in and out the main gate, and a swarm of officers buzzed around the telegraph office, where the busy and alert operator sat at his post.

Linn found the suspense very trying, and about noon, being off duty, he started for the sutler's store, where he knew he would find some of his boon companions. His name was called from behind as he was crossing the parade ground, and turning around, he saw Sergeant Mull.

"I've just been at your quarters, Osborne," said the sergeant. "The colonel wants to see you right away. You'll find him at the company office. Step lively. It's something important."

CHAPTER XIX.

LINN MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

Linn did not stop to ask any questions. With a salute to the sergeant, he hurried off, not knowing what was wanted of him, but nevertheless feeling decidedly uneasy. In the company office two clerks were writing busily at the dictation of Colonel Bromley and Major Dallas, and several other officers were talking in low tones near by.

The colonel glanced up when the lad entered.

"Good-morning, Corporal Osborne," he said.

"Corporal, sir?" exclaimed Linn, in a bewildered tone.

"Yes, that is your grade now, Osborne. I sent for you to inform you of the fact. The major and I are satisfied that your recent conduct entitles you to fill the vacancy in the troop caused by the death of poor Otis. And from what I hear, the appointment will be pleasing to your comrades.

"According to the regular routine you could not have been notified so soon," the colonel stated; "but I have taken the responsibility of giving you your grade at once, and have sent the papers on to department headquarters to be certified. This unusual step is justified by the circumstances. I trust there will be only good reports of you in the future."

"There shall be, sir," stammered Linn. "I assure you of that."

He was fairly overcome by this unexpected mark of favor, and could find no words to express his gratitude, though he made several awkward attempts to do so.

"There—that will do," said Major Dallas. "You deserve your promotion, Osborne, and I am sure you will make good use of it. You may be tested before long. You will want your chevron, of course. Report to Sergeant Mull, and he will attend to the matter."

Linn saluted gracefully, and left the office, swelling with pride and joy. His brain was in a dizzy whirl as he crossed the parade ground. After the bitter experiences of the past, his good fortune seemed almost incredible. He could hardly realize that he had taken the first step upward from the ranks, and that, in spite of Captain Norman's hostility, he was in a fair way to achieve his ambitions.

So engrossed was Linn in his own thoughts that he saw nothing about him, and so he nearly ran into a young officer who had just left the hospital and started toward the barracks. Both stopped short, and the officer looked strangely at Linn. He was a tall, handsome fellow, his face was thin and pale, and on his forehead were two or three lately healed scars.

Linn returned the glance, and like a flash the present scene faded away, and all the incidents of that eventful night in the hotel at Harrisburg crowded into his mind.

"Lieutenant Dimsdale!" he gasped, in astonishment.

"By Jove! its really you, then?" cried the young officer, in a tone of hearty delight. "I can't tell you how glad I am to meet you again, my brave fellow."

He clasped Linn's hand, and shook it warmly.

"I have not forgotten you," he went on. "You know you saved my life, Osborne, and at the risk of your own. But it was hardly kind of you to give me the slip before I could thank you. I did my best to find you, but it was no use."

"I'm sorry," replied Linn, "but I had to leave town that

morning. I saw by the paper that you were all right. I would have stayed if I could——”

“Yes, I see. It’s pretty clear why you wanted to get away. So you went straight off and enlisted, and I’ll bet what I said during our conversation had a good deal to do with—— By Jove! you’re the Osborne they’ve been talking about. You’re the same fellow who behaved so pluckily at Chamberlain, and fired the first shot at the Sioux out on Bull Creek. I might have guessed it.”

“Yes, I’m the man,” admitted Linn. “I don’t think it was much to boast of, but I’ve just been made a corporal for it.”

“Have you, though?” cried Lieutenant Dimsdale. “Well, you certainly deserve it. And you’re in Troop A. Why, that’s my own troop. I’m awfully glad of it. We’ll see a lot of each other in a way——”

“You belong to Troop A?” cried Linn, a light suddenly breaking on him. “Then you’re the officer who brought the new recruits to Chamberlain, and has been laid up in hospital ever since? And now you are to fill Lieutenant Coghill’s place?”

“Yes, temporarily,” replied Lieutenant Dimsdale. “But it will be long enough to see some active service, I’m thinking. I would like to have a long talk with you, Osborne, but I’m afraid there’s no chance of it now. One thing I must say, and I hope you’ll take it in good part, and set it down to the friendship and gratitude I feel for you. May I speak freely?”

“Of course,” said Linn.

“Well, then, Osborne, it’s just this. I see now that you had an object in getting me to talk about the army that night. You are well educated, and a gentleman, and fellows of that stamp don’t generally enlist. When they do it is for one of two reasons—either they get in a paternal row and run away from home, or they are under a darker

cloud. What was your reason?—not the latter, I'll warrant."

"I left home because my father unjustly ordered me away," replied Linn, feeling his face grow hot. "It was a cruel affair all through, and I don't care to speak of it. But I had done nothing wrong or disgraceful—nothing that I need be ashamed of. I give you my word of honor on that. The truth will come out some day, and then I will tell you the whole story."

"I believe you, Osborne," said Lieutenant Dimsdale. "Your face is evidence enough. I was sure of it from the first, but I thought it would be wise to mention the matter. When a man enlists under a cloud, and works his way up, it is likely to go hard with him if the truth is ever discovered. I've known cases of that kind. More than one good officer has gone to smash because of a blot on his early life. In these days, you see, the army is mighty particular about character."

This view of the matter had not occurred to Linn before, and for a moment he could not speak. It frightened him to think that he might be recognized and exposed some day, when he had climbed high on the ladder of promotion, and that he might not be able to prove his innocence. But he rallied from the depression instantly, and consoled himself by the assurance that he had done no wrong, and therefore had nothing to fear.

"My worst mistake was leaving home," he said, after a pause. "I first intended to go West and look for a position of some sort. But I had always wanted to be a soldier, and after my talk with you I decided to enlist."

"I thought so," replied Lieutenant Dimsdale, with a laugh and a shrug of his shoulders. "My friends tell me I talk too much, Osborne, and I believe they are right. Had I known you were thinking of enlisting I would have been as mum as an oyster about the army. But I'm

glad to think there's been no harm done in this case. From what I've heard lately, you seem to be the one man in a thousand who can work his way up from the ranks. So keep on as you've begun, and remember that you can count on me for all the help in my power."

"You are very kind, sir," Linn answered. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart. It won't be my fault if I don't climb higher."

"I owe you a heap more than I can repay," the lieutenant resumed. "But for your bravery that night in Harrisburg, I wouldn't be here now. Just a word more, Osborne. The hospital steward—who is a friend of yours—gave me an inkling of how you stand with Captain Norman. So be on your guard constantly, and don't leave a loop-hole open. Norman is a brave officer—though a little queer, and I think he'll play fairly."

"I hope so," replied Linn; "but from what they say about him——"

"Hush, Osborne; no disrespect to your captain. I'm afraid I've said too much, as usual. But keep my warning in mind, and——"

Lieutenant Dimsdale stopped abruptly, and shaded his eyes with one hand as he glanced toward the telegraph office.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "There's something wrong! It must be news from the front."

Assuredly it was. The operator was tearing for the company office, a sheet of yellow paper fluttering in his grasp. He vanished within, quickly reappeared, and tore back to his post. A few seconds later the colonel, the major and the rest of the assembled officers came swarming out, and scattered in different directions across the parade ground.

Major Dallas caught sight of Linn and the lieutenant, and swerved from his course to join them.

"Glad to see you out, Dimsdale," he shouted. "Are you fit for service?"

"By all means, sir. I was discharged this morning."

"Good! Then you will join your troop at once. Every man is needed. Report to Norman, and send him to me. Take this list of rations to the quartermaster, Osborne. Be quick; the call to mount will sound in a short time."

"Is there word from the reservations, major?" asked the lieutenant.

"Plenty of it, sir," was the snappy reply. "The Sioux have cut the wires between here and Red Rock, and the Lord only knows what the red devils are up to. And down at the Rosebud agency Flying Thunder and a lot of his braves are carrying things with a high hand. The colonel is going to start two columns off—one to report at Red Rock, and the other to try to arrest Flying Thunder. It looks as though a general outbreak was imminent, but we're going to do our best to nip it in the bud. It's a late hour to begin, but that's the fault of the bureau at Washington. The colonel has been jogging them up all week, but they wouldn't listen to reason."

Growling and fussing at the tardy bureau, the major hurried on his way, and Linn and Lieutenant Dimsdale separated in opposite directions.

CHAPTER XX.

A MESSENGER FROM THE FRONT.

During the short hour that followed the receipt of the thrilling news from the front, Colonel Bromley was the busiest and most deeply worried man in Fort Sandiman. Between brief intervals of consultation with his officers, he sent message after message in different directions, and kept the telegraph operator working at a tremendous pressure.

What was happening at Red Rock agency could only be conjectured, but none doubted that the cutting of the wires had been done by the Sioux, and that the deed had some sinister and treacherous motive. In all likelihood, an attack was contemplated on the agency itself, and that would mean the loss of the supplies and rations stored there, and possibly the slaughter of the agent, his family, and employees. Gray Fox was fully capable of going to extremes in his passion.

The news from the Rosebud agency, which was some forty miles to the southwest of the fort, was readily to be understood and dealt with. Specified in detail, as the agent had wired, it was to the effect that Flying Thunder and about fifty of his braves were hovering around the agency, indulging in fiery speeches, drunken orgies and hostile demonstrations, and making themselves troublesome and dangerous. More than that, they had cruelly killed a friendly Cheyenne in the employ of the agent.

Colonel Bromley realized that prompt action was necessary. Much against his will, he had held off a week in

the face of the constantly growing peril, and now that the War Department had wakened up to the situation, he proposed to waste no more time. At heart he was more than half convinced that the delay was irretrievable, and that what could be done now would not check the outbreak.

But he resolved to do his best, and as a first step he ordered three troops of the Seventh Cavalry to the relief of Red Rock agency, fully equipped for long and active field service. He also wired to the commander of Fort Bennet—which was forty miles north of Red Rock, on the upper Missouri—asking that a detachment of cavalry be sent down there to join the detachment from Fort Sandiman. If this plan worked all right, Gray Fox and his braves would be hemmed in between two forces, and might be brought to see the folly of his conduct. This was unlikely, however, and the main object of the move was to protect the agency.

The colonel proposed to deal with Rosebud agency in a different fashion. He knew that Flying Thunder was a far more powerful chief than Gray Fox, and that the latter was counting on the support of his formidable ally. The chances were ten to one that Gray Fox, if deprived of this support, could be easily subdued and brought to terms.

So, relying on the fact that Flying Thunder was accompanied by only fifty of his warriors, the colonel determined to get possession of that dangerous chief and hold him as a hostage for the good behavior of his tribe. He ordered two troops of the Seventh to ride in haste to Rosebud agency, and accomplish the arrest of Flying Thunder, if possible by craft, otherwise by force of arms.

The colonel had not been blind to the possibility that a large band of the Ogallalla Sioux might be in hiding in

the vicinity of the agency, and that Flying Thunder's small escort was only a ruse to lure a detachment of troops from Fort Sandiman, and at one and the same time destroy the soldiers and capture the agency.

Indeed, he had thought of this the moment when the telegram arrived, but when he put the question before his advising officers—most of whom were well versed in Indian craft and were veterans of many a frontier fight—they scouted the idea, and refused to credit Flying Thunder with any such murderous intention. So the orders were allowed to stand as first issued, since, while the colonel was not convinced, he had not a sufficient force at his command to act otherwise.

In addition to the above, other and more extensive plans were made for grappling with the emergency. Full reports were sent to Washington, to all the agents on the Dakota reservations, to Fort Niobrara down in Nebraska, and to the scattered forts far to the westward of the Bad Lands, where the Sioux would likely flee in case of a general outbreak.

It was a busy hour at headquarters and in the telegraph office, and meanwhile every part of the fort presented a scene of stirring activity and commotion. The note of bugles mingled with the tap of drums, and several companies of infantry shared the bustle of preparation with the cavalrymen. Colonel Banks, the regimental commander and vice-commander of the post, had an idea that some of his men would be ordered to march to one or another of the agencies, and he was bound to be ready in time.

In and out of barracks swarmed the eager troopers and officers, fittingly garbed in fatigue uniforms—loose trousers and jackets of blue, high boots and gray slouch hats.

There was a lively polishing of arms and accoutrements, and a hasty scribbling of letters home. The stables rang with clatter of hoofs and shrill neighing, as many hands saddled and bridled the impatient steeds for the march.

In the quartermaster's department half a dozen men dealt out rations of hard tack and flour, coffee and beans, to be stowed away in countless haversacks. Ammunition was freely distributed, and belts were loaded with ball cartridges. A swarm of troopers invested the sutler's store, within and without, clamoring for pipes and matches, packets of smoking tobacco and thick plugs of black navy. From end to end of the officers' quarters there were low weeping and fond embraces, as wives and children bade farewell to the loved ones who were starting on what would likely prove to be a long and dangerous campaign.

There were plenty of passive on-lookers within the confines of the fort—troopers and infantrymen who were not under marching orders, and therefore envied their more fortunate comrades; packers and teamsters waiting for a chance to load the big wagons that would shortly follow with supplies after the flying columns; newspaper correspondents, who had been drawn to the scene from distant towns, as buzzards scent the location of distant carrion; scouts under orders to accompany the forces, and unattached scouts in quest of appointments; grizzled couriers rolling quids of tobacco in their mouths, and women and children whose dear ones were not to leave for the present.

At one o'clock, half an hour after the receipt of the tidings, three skilled telegraph linemen started north with an escort of ten troopers. Their instructions were to find the break in the wire, re-open communication as quickly

as possible, and then await the arrival of the column for Red Rock.

Just an hour later the five chosen troops of the Seventh started. Hearty cheers followed them as they rode on a trot out the western gate of the fort, their guidons fluttering to the breeze, the trumpets pealing, and the September sun glistening on carbines and brass buttons. There was no prouder or happier man in the force than Linn, as he sat stiffly erect in the saddle, his heart bounding with anticipation, and the corporal's chevron—the badge of his promotion—sewed on his jacket.

Shortly beyond the fort the column divided into two battalions, and separated with a brief exchange of good wishes and farewells. The three troops under Major Dallas—of which Troop A was one—galloped off on their long ride of thirty miles to Red Rock agency. The two other troops, commanded by the senior captain, Chalmers, headed southwest for the forty-mile jaunt to Rosebud, where Flying Thunder was to be taken prisoner by force or craft. Moving rapidly on the widely diverging lines of a triangle, the two columns were soon out of sight and hearing of each other.

The northbound battalion had the shorter ride, but the graver mission, and Major Dallas was aware of this fact. He spurred on at a steady gallop, occasionally unslinging his field-glasses to scan the horizon. Men and horses were in prime condition, many months having elapsed since they had seen arduous service, and for hour after hour the column thundered untiringly over the rolling and sage-covered plain.

Troop A took the lead, and with Major Dallas at the head of the battalion rode two of the bravest and most skilled of the frontier scouts—Jim Akers and Bob Lowther. There were also attached to the party a surgeon, a

small ambulance corps and three experienced farriers. Linn rode in ranks with his men, and Lieutenant Dimsdale hovered near enough to keep up a straggling conversation with the lad.

About the middle of the afternoon, when a point half-way between the fort and the agency had been reached, the column overtook the advance detachment, and was relieved to find the little party safe. They had discovered a pole down, and the wire cut in two places. No Indians being about, they at once started in to repair the break, and had just completed the work when the battalion hove in sight.

From the marks of ponies' hoofs on the sand and turf—signs which were easy reading for the two scouts—it appeared that the damage had been done by less than a score of Indians, and that the marauders had fled in a westerly direction instead of toward the agency.

"We can't tell what's up," said Major Dallas, as he ordered the trumpeter to sound the advance. "It may be only a bit of mischief, and then again, the rogues may have joined a larger force and pushed on to the agency. It's the safest plan to lose no time, now that communication is opened again."

The bugle sounded, and the battalion filed on over the dusty plain. It did not move quite so rapidly as before, for this was the hottest part of the day, and there had been no rain for weeks, and the scorching September sun began to tell a little on men and horses.

But at last the red ball of fire dropped behind the western hill-tops, and with the twilight came a cool and grateful air. Half an hour later darkness had fallen, and now Red Rock agency was only four miles away. Just ahead lay a ridge, and as the troopers jogged up to the summit they heard three or four rifle shots ring faintly through the night.

In the brief stillness that ensued a solitary horse came clattering up the farther slope of the ridge, and an instant later a thrilling spectacle loomed into view in the gloom—a jaded and panting steed, and in the saddle a swaying, blood-stained man, who had scarcely any strength to pull up in front of Major Dallas.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BATTALION AT THE AGENCY.

"Good heavens! it's Calder!" cried the major, recognizing the right-hand man of Triscott, the agent at Red Rock.

He and Akers dismounted in a trice and sprang to opposite sides of the poor fellow in time to catch him as he reeled from the saddle. He sank limply into their arms, but as soon as they let him to the ground he made a strong effort to sit up.

"Thank God! I've found help!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "It's you, Major Dallas, is it? I can't see just right, but I thought I knew your voice. Push on to the agency—don't waste a minute. They've been fighting since noon, and they're at it now."

"Fighting?" demanded the major. "Is it that bad?"

"It couldn't be much worse, sir," answered the man. "There are three hundred of the red devils under Gray Fox, and they've plundered the store-houses and the trader's store, and tried their best to break into the agent's house——"

"How did you get away?" the major asked, hurriedly. "And when?"

"I made a dash for it about half-past three o'clock, when the Indians had drawn off a bit," replied Calder. "They fired at me and hit me in the arm. I kept on for a couple of miles, and then I must have fainted from loss of blood and slipped out of the saddle. The next thing I knew it was dark and I was lying back here in the grass,

with my faithful horse standing close by. My wound had closed up, and after taking a pull at a flask I was able to mount and ride on. I reckoned I might meet a relief party on the way from the fort. But don't stop here, sir. You're needed badly——"

"All right, my brave fellow," interposed the major; "we'll waste no time. You say you left about half-past three. That was before the wire was mended and communication opened. Triscott knew several hours ago that we were coming, and I daresay he'll manage to hold out."

"He couldn't have known, sir," replied the messenger. "for the office and other buildings had to be abandoned. The whole party are shut up in the agent's house."

The major gave a low whistle. He would have liked to ask more questions, but the urgency of the situation forbade it. So he sent Calder to the rear and promptly gave the command to start.

The column advanced on a gallop, and the ambulance corps, which had taken charge of the wounded man, found it hard work to keep up. The force was large enough to cope with the number of Indians Calder had estimated, for the linemen and their cavalry escort had been attached to the three troops. The men were all in good spirits, and eager for a fight, and Major Dallas knew they could be depended upon.

As the flying hoofs traversed the prairie an intermittent rifle-fire was heard from in front, telling that the agent and his people were still resisting an attack. One mile was quickly passed—two—three. Now the firing was louder and more rapid, and from the crest of a ridge, several hundred yards in front, the battalion would come in view of the scene.

"It's a rare thing for Indians to continue an assault

after dark," said the major. "I can't understand what it means."

"It means that the red devils have glutted themselves with the trader's bad whisky, sir," replied Bob Lowther, the elder of the two scouts, "and naturally they don't make any difference betwixt day and night."

"That's about it," assented the major. "We'll soon be there now."

Up the long slope of the ridge clattered the column, every man peering ahead and listening to the rattle of carbines and the burst of demoniac yells that now filled the air. Linn felt a wild thrill of excitement, but no sensation of fear. In the struggle that seemed imminent he was determined to play a plucky part, and even the near-by presence of Captain Norman could not shatter his bright hopes of fame and promotion.

"It looks as though we are in for it, Osborne," said Lieutenant Dimsdale, as he spurred his horse alongside of the lad. "This will be somewhat different from the row in Chamberlain and the fight on Bull Creek. Don't lose your head."

"I won't, sir," promised Linn. "I feel as cool as a cucumber."

The lieutenant nodded approvingly, and just then the head of the battalion rode over the crest of the ridge. There was now a level space stretching ahead for some distance to the beginning of the opposite slope, and when the front ranks reached the latter point Major Dallas rode a little to one side and gave the signal to halt by lifting his hand.

The column instantly stood still, stretching in a quiet black mass across the level top of the ridge. Its presence was unsuspected by the rabid band of Sioux in the near vicinity, but every man of the troopers could see down to the foot of the slope.

There, a third of a mile away, a bunch of lights flickered in the blackness of the night. A strange medley of sounds echoed far and near—the screech and whoop of savage voices, the bang of carbines and pistols, and the restless patter of ponies' hoofs.

"What next, sir?" inquired Akers.

"A charge, I fancy, replied the major. "I hoped there would be some fires blazing to show me the strength of the enemy. They may have been reinforced since Calder——"

As he spoke the yelling rose to a higher pitch, and suddenly a little tongue of flame leaped into view. It soared higher and higher, and it was quickly seen that one of the out-buildings was on fire. The red glare revealed the cluster of houses and sheds nestled in the corral, the main gate standing wide open, and hundreds of dusky, mounted figures gliding to and fro within and without the stockade.

Not a sound escaped the well-trained troopers as they looked and listened, waiting impatiently for the word to advance. Linn's heart leaped into his throat, and with tingling hands he half drew his carbine out of its holster.

"There are more than three hundred Indians," said the major, in a low tone. "What do you think, Lowther?"

"I should say double that number, sir," replied the scout.

"My opinion," assented the major. "Well, I think we can scatter them like prairie chickens. In the darkness they'll be sure to over-estimate our force."

"Norman," he added, calling that officer to his side, "I'm going to advance on a gallop at full speed, and we'll do a lot of yelling, and keep the bugles sounding at a lively rate. Unless I am greatly mistaken, Gray Fox and his braves will take to the plain before we are half way down the slope, and that will give us a chance to enter the corral

and close the gate. There is to be no firing unless in case of absolute necessity. Remember that."

These orders were quickly communicated to the troop commanders, and by them to the men. As Major Dallas gave the word to charge, the shrill blast of bugles blended with a burst of cheers, and down the slope thundered the whole battalion six abreast, making noise enough for ten times the number.

The effect was almost instantaneous. The Indians were taken by surprise, nor were they so intoxicated as not to realize their peril. By the light of the burning building the mounted braves were seen pouring in confusion out of the corral, and by the time the cavalry were two-thirds down the slope the whole band had vanished right and left in the darkness that shrouded the surrounding plain.

But the true cunning and craft of the Sioux were yet to be proved. As the battalion reached the foot of the slope a ready-prepared heap of dried grass burst into flame close by, and the brave who had ignited it sped away for dear life. Half a dozen carbines cracked, and the rogue fell headlong before he had taken ten steps.

But the mischief was already done. The brief spurt of the flame had revealed the true strength of the troopers to the enemy, and as the column galloped on hundreds of yelling Indians closed in on it from the rear.

It meant annihilation to stop, and the brisk fire of the Sioux was answered by the rear guard of the troopers, who let fly volley after volley as they turned in their saddles. On swept the battalion, horses and men crowding pell-mell through the stockade gate.

File after file dismounted as quickly as it arrived, and a score of brave fellows led by Major Dallas and the two scouts—Linn included in the number—dashed back to cover the retreat. In hot haste and confusion the closely-

pressed rear guard poured into the corral, more than one steed running riderless, and right at their heels came a rabid and whooping horde of Sioux.

But the relief party was on the spot, and lined up on each side of the gateway. Others were struggling forward from behind through the rout, and as the last mounted trooper galloped into the corral Major Dallas gave a loud command to fire. A score of rifles flashed and cracked, and a volley of lead was rained into the huddled ranks of the foe.

CHAPTER XXII.

A QUIET NIGHT.

That volley saved the battalion and all the other inmates of the corral. It checked the mad rush barely in time, and through the gaps of the powder smoke, stained red by the glare of the burning building, the foremost Indians were seen to fall dead or wounded from the saddle, while frightened ponies reared and pranced, darted this way and that.

Those behind wavered an instant, checked by the rain of bullets and the obstructing bodies. Then they came on with blood-curdling yells, only to find themselves too late. In a voice that rang clear above the din Major Dallas shouted:

“Close the gate, men—quick!”

Led by Corporal Osborne, a dozen troopers seized the heavy framework of timbers, swung it shut in the very faces of the desperate Sioux, and dropped the massive bars into place. The air rang with screams of baffled rage and the crack of dozens of rifles. For a few moments bullets pattered thickly on the stout beams, and then the foe sullenly withdrew to a short distance.

The danger was not yet over, and had the confusion lasted a short time longer the Sioux might have accomplished a bloody massacre. But the major was equal to the emergency, and by prompt action he restored order and secured the safety of those under his command and protection.

Trumpeter Grant was at his elbow, and as the bugle

sounded the order to dismount, all of the battalion who yet remained in the saddle leaped to the ground. A whole troop was speedily detailed for defense, and with loaded rifles the men lined up at the loopholes and platforms that were to be found on all four sides of the corral.

The Sioux were still hovering about the front of the stockade and the two end walls, whooping and firing, and evidently meditating an attack in force. With cool and deliberate aim the troopers shot into the midst of the band, and at the first straggling volley the Indians made off into the darkness.

Meanwhile, a dozen men under Sergeant Mull had attacked the burning building, which was merely a small shed used for storing wood and coal. Some battered down the blazing planks, while others brought pails of water from the well. The fire was soon under control and beyond the power of spreading.

By this time quiet and order were fully restored. The troopers guarding the stockade stood watchfully at their posts, the ambulance corps was attending to the wounded, and the horses were picketed in the stables and in the rear part of the corral.

The little party had sallied out of the agent's house, which had stood so gallant a siege with its iron shutters and heavy door. The rescued ones comprised the eight or nine employees of the agency, with their wives and children, and the latter cried for joy as they found themselves in safety, and surrounded by the blue-clad soldiers; more than one strong man had tears in his eyes.

Major Dallas came forward from a round of the stockade, and shook hands with Triscott, the agent. The latter was a tall, powerful man, and not wanting in bravery, but his nerves had been thoroughly unstrung by his late experiences. His face was pale and haggard, and his lips twitched constantly.

"Glad to see you, major," he said. "I hear you met Calder half-way. He brought you just in the nick of time, for the Indians had fired yonder shed, and were about to begin on the quarters."

"How did it happen?" the major asked, sternly.

He was inwardly in a fuming rage, and felt sure there had been negligence somewhere.

"How did it happen?" Triscott repeated. "Well, I hardly know myself, sir, though I'm not to blame. The Sioux slipped into the corral by twos and threes, letting on they wanted to parley. Then of a sudden they went wild, and broke into the storehouse and the trader's store. It was no use to argue with them, and I didn't dare to open fire. So I got all my party into the house, and made ready the rifles and ammunition.

"And it was well I did, sir. You see, I knew by the wires being down that trouble was intended. The braves gutted the trader's store, and carried off all the rations somewhere back in the hills. Then, being full of rum, they did their best to storm the house and get our scalps. We had a lively time before Calder left, and a livelier one afterward. We killed a lot of the rascals, but none of my men are seriously hurt."

"My liquor and other goods are all gone, sir," interposed the trader. "It was shameful the way the Sioux wasted the stuff. I shall look to the Government to make up the loss."

"The Government will have considerable investigating to do, my man," snapped the major. "Rest assured of that. And I think the inquiry will begin with you, Triscott. Had the gate been closed and barred, and your men been at their posts, not an Indian could have entered the corral. You could have stood them off until we arrived. There, that will do. I don't want to hear a word now."

The interview ended thus abruptly. With uneasiness

and wrath in their hearts, Triscott and the trader slouched off toward the house, while the major and some of his officers started in to investigate the situation and reckon the damage.

In addition to the agent's residence, the stockade inclosed a row of quarters for his men and their families, a little school-house, the stables, the store-house, the trader's store, and the telegraph office. The latter place was first visited, in company with the operator, but his tap at the instrument brought no reply.

"I didn't expect any answer," he explained. "There has been no communication all day."

"You were not in a condition to know that, sir," replied the major, "since you were all shut up in the house for a number of hours. But it is likely that the wires were cut close by here as well as midway to the fort. So we can't communicate with Colonel Bromley."

"What are we going to do about it?" asked Captain Norman.

"We can't do anything at present," answered the major. "I believe troops from Fort Bennet have been ordered here, and they will likely arrive by morning. Then we can send out a large enough force to repair the line, and as soon as that is done we will receive instructions. The Indians will keep a close watch to-night, or I would try to get a messenger through at once."

From the telegraph office the major's party passed on to the trader's store. It was found gutted, barrels of liquor having been wantonly spilled over the floor. The big store-house close by was quite empty—stripped of the vast supplies of rations it had contained, and which would now permit the Sioux to take the war-path with full stomachs assured for the future.

An inquiry was next made into the number killed and wounded. Seven dead Indians lay in the close vicinity

of the agent's house, and two of Triscott's party were found to have been shot more or less seriously. Five men of the battalion had been wounded by the fire of the charging Sioux, and three had failed to come into the corral.

As the enemy were probably at a distance, Major Dallas determined to recover the bodies of the missing ones—for he was satisfied that the poor fellows were dead. Lowther, the scout, slipped out the gate to reconnoitre and returned in five minutes to report that the coast was clear in the immediate vicinity.

Half a dozen men then went out, and in a short time they were back with the scalped and mutilated bodies of the three troopers. They reported seeing at least a dozen dead Indians on the ground. More than one desperate oath of vengeance was sworn as the lifeless forms of the three cavalymen were carried past their comrades to the store-house and there stretched out under blankets.

By the command of Major Dallas, the Sioux who had fallen in the siege of the house were deposited outside the stockade. He knew that some time during the darkness of the night Gray Fox and his braves would likely find a way to remove their killed.

Meanwhile a hearty supper had been served out to the weary troopers and their more weary steeds, and by midnight the men were sleeping peacefully around the little camp-fires that dotted the corral from end to end. The school-house had been turned into a hospital, and here Calder and the other wounded lay on hastily improvised cots, their needs attended to by the surgeon and his assistants. Behind the four walls of the stockade the alert troopers—a force that had lately relieved the first guard—stood watch and ward against the hundreds of Sioux who were bivouacked on the neighboring hills.

Few sounds were heard save the restless champing of

the staked horses, the occasional turning of a slumbering soldier, a groan of pain from the hospital, or the muffled tread of a sentry pacing his round of duty.

Major Dallas had taken possession of the telegraph office for his headquarters, and here he held a long and secret consultation with his officers. The latter finally departed to seek their blankets and sleeping quarters, but there was no rest for the major. He started out on a round of the corral, and then wandered to and fro among his men.

Linn was dozing by one of the fires of Troop A, his blanket wrapped partly around him, and his rifle clutched in one hand. A tap on the shoulder roused him and brought him to his feet. He looked up to meet his commander's kindly glance.

"Have you slept long?" asked the major.

"I think I have, sir," replied Linn. "I feel much refreshed. Is anything wrong?"

"No; all is well. I had my eye on you this evening, Osborne, and I am pleased with your conduct. I am going to give you some new duties for the present—while we remain at the agency. I want you to act as my clerk. I have sprained two fingers of my right hand and can't easily write."

"I am at your service, sir," said Linn, as he followed the major to the telegraph office. He sat down at a table, with pencil, paper and a lighted lamp before him, and for two hours he wrote steadily and rapidly as Major Dallas dictated several long dispatches. Then, with well-earned commendation, he returned to his post at the fire.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NEWS FROM ROSEBUD.

The night passed without alarm, and the cool, gray dawn brought relief to many an anxious heart. Up over the dry and parched prairie crept the red September sun, and another day had begun its course. By eight o'clock men and officers had breakfasted and were attending to their various duties as calmly as though they were at the fort.

At his headquarters in the telegraph office sat Major Dallas, looking as spruce and fresh as though he had not missed the greater part of the night's sleep. Linn was there in his new and proud capacity of clerk. The operator lounged at his desk, smoking a clay pipe and tampering with the useless instruments. Officers and agency employees passed in and out, some to make reports, others to ask instructions.

The major listened gravely to what meagre information was brought him. The dead Indians had been removed under cover of the night, and now the whole band of Sioux occupied the hill-slopes to the westward, a good mile from the agency. At present they did not seem disposed to make trouble. A field-glass showed the braves squatted in long lines on the grass, and the staked ponies feeding near by.

The wounded within the agency were all doing well, and had fair chances of recovery. The three dead troopers still lay in the school-house. Rude boxes were being made for them, but it was hoped that they might be buried in the cemetery at the fort, instead of in this lonely spot.

Gray Fox evinced no desire to have a talk with the soldiers of the Great Father, and the major was not disposed to open negotiations. He felt that it would be useless, and not without sound reason. At daybreak a friendly Cheyenne in Triscott's service had come safely into the agency. He had been out for nearly two days in the upper part of the Brule reservation, and he reported that the Indian lodges, with the squaws, children and old men, had vanished mysteriously toward the west. This showed pretty clearly that Gray Fox was ready and resolved to take the war-path, and that it would not be worth while to hold any communication with him.

Major Dallas was more worried and anxious than he chose to let appear. He had dispatches written, but dared not start a messenger out with them. There was no sign as yet of the expected reinforcements, and he realized the importance of opening connection with the fort. This would enable him to learn if troops had been sent from Fort Bennet, and would give him instructions from Colonel Bromley. He would also be advised of what was taking place on the Rosebud agency—a matter that caused him considerable uneasiness. It was his private opinion—and his officers shared it—that a long and bloody Indian war had about commenced.

Meanwhile, the major had taken prompt steps to establish communication with Fort Sandiman. After breakfast he sent a party of half a dozen out to reconnoitre the line. They went no further than a deep ravine a quarter of a mile to the southwestward of the corral, where they found the wires broken and three poles down.

They returned at once to report, and shortly afterward several linemen went to the spot in care of twenty armed troopers. This party was hard at work by nine o'clock, while the major sat attending to business at headquarters. He was beset by fears that the Indians would swoop down

on the brave fellows, or that the line might prove to be broken at other points.

But with the exception of a thin skirmish line of braves, who fired harmlessly from a distance at the workmen and their escort, the Sioux made no hostile demonstrations. They plainly had other matters to think about, for now more bands of Indians were beginning to pour in from the reservation to the north. They came steadily on for an hour, and by ten o'clock it was evident that the whole tribe of Brules was assembled. In the opinion of the scouts the force numbered close upon fifteen hundred.

About this time the major's face grew haggard, and he was in a fever of anxiety. The messages brought him by the watchers at the stockade indicated that the situation was critical. In all likelihood a general attack was to be made on the agency, and the working party would be driven in before communication could be opened.

Over the office was a watch-tower that rose above the level of the corral walls, and in order to get a view for himself the major mounted this, accompanied by several officers, Linn, and the operator. They arrived in time to see a strange and perplexing thing. Over the ridge to the south came two mounted Indians on a gallop. They rode into the thick of the assembled Brules, and by the aid of a glass they could be made out talking earnestly to Gray Fox.

A moment later there was widespread confusion and bustle, the ponies were unstaked, and the hundreds of braves sprang to the saddle. Led by Gray Fox, the head of the column rode slantingly up the hill, and turned southwestward down the opposite slope. In five minutes all had vanished—not a brave was in sight.

"Thank Heaven! the line is safe!" exclaimed Captain Norman. "They are riding away from it, and away from their reservation as well. But what can the move mean?"

"I would give much to know," the major gravely replied. "Unless my glass deceived me, the messengers were Ogallallas. They must have brought some word from Flying Thunder."

Before more could be said the little party on the tower were startled to hear the sharp blast of a trumpet from a distant point in the rear. Turning around toward the north, they beheld a welcome sight—a column of cavalry winding down a hill-slope half a mile away.

Troop after troop appeared on the crest, until ten had been counted. With blast of bugles and flying colors, and glitter and flash of arms, the battalion filed down to the plain on the eastern side of the corral, and there dismounted with orderly precision. Loud cheering arose from those in the agency.

The watch-tower was hurriedly abandoned, and a minute later Major Dallas and Major Carter of Fort Bennet met in a hearty handshake at the open gate of the stockade. What there was to tell was soon told. The ten troops had left Fort Bennet at midnight, and up to that time no news of importance had been received from Fort Sandiman.

"I'm glad you came, Carter," said Major Dallas. "But the Sioux are gone, and I have no idea where. It was not your approach that started them off, for they knew nothing of it. The line is nearly repaired, I trust, and then we shall learn——"

As he spoke there was an eager shout from the stockade, and in through the gate poured the linemen and their escort. The two majors and a dozen other officers rushed to the telegraph office, where Linn and the operator were in a state of vast excitement.

"The line is open, sir," cried the latter, whose hand was on the key. "I just got the signal."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Major Dallas. "Now give them this message, Tenney be quick."

In rapid tones he dictated a brief dispatch, outlining what had happened at the agency, and telling of the withdrawal of the Brules on the arrival of the two supposed Ogallalla messengers. He added the information that the battalion from Fort Bennet had just arrived and asked for instructions.

The operator wired the message as it was dictated, and after that there was a brief pause. Then the call was sounded and the instrument began to click at a lively rate. Tenney was a skilled telegrapher, and as the words were flashed to him by the operator at Fort Sandiman he repeated them aloud as follows:

"To Major Dallas, Red Rock agency. Your advices received. Glad to find the line open again. The line to Rosebud has been cut since four o'clock yesterday afternoon, but two couriers have just arrived from there. They report the treacherous massacre of Captain Chalmers, two officers and eleven privates, while holding a truce with Flying Thunder. The Indians fired without warning, and at close range. Our men returned the fire, and retreated to the corral. They are supposed to be in a state of siege. The massacre occurred early last evening."

Tenney leaned back in his chair, his face ghastly pale. Major Dallas groaned aloud, and then the little room echoed with exclamations of pity and grief, and hoarse vows of vengeance. Amid the tumult, Tenney lifted his hand with a gesture of silence.

"More word?" Major Dallas asked, hoarsely.

"Yes, here it is."

The operator leaned forward, his hand on the key, and read out slowly, as before:

"From Colonel Bromley to Major Dallas. Communi-

cation just opened with Rosebud. Flying Thunder and nearly two thousand braves left at midnight toward the northwest. It is supposed they will connect at an angle with Gray Fox and his band, and make for the Bad Lands together. These are your orders. Bury the dead, leave one of the troops from Fort Bennet at the agency, and with the remaining force—which you will assume sole command of—start before evening for the junction of White River and Black Pipe Creek. At this rendezvous you will be joined by the two troops from Rosebud, and possibly by some from Fort Niobrara. There you will also be met by a courier with instructions, and by supply wagons. The field column under your command will likely push after the foe, and if possible they will be headed off from in front. Lose no time, and report when you start.”

A moment later the operator was alone at his post, and the bustle of preparation filled the corral. There was no mistaking the news. It meant that the campaign had actually begun, and that Uncle Sam had a big contract on hand.

The point of rendezvous was off to the westward, about thirty-five miles distant from both the Rosebud and Red Rock agencies. It was a long ride, and Major Dallas wisely allowed the force from Fort Bennet several hours' rest. But by four o'clock the bugles sounded, and word was flashed to Fort Sandiman. A little later the twelve troops rode out of the corral, and vanished over the ridge from the view of those left behind.

The rendezvous was reached several hours after midnight, and the battalion went into camp. At daybreak the scouts reported that Gray Fox and Flying Thunder had joined forces in the near vicinity during the previous evening, and had pushed on to the west. This was indicated by signs on the ground.

Before noon the survivors of the two troops from Rosebud arrived, and had a stirring tale to tell of the massacre and the subsequent fight and siege. Captain McClellan was in command. Late in the day four troops from Fort Niobrara reached the rendezvous, having marched a long distance in a wonderfully short time, and shortly afterward came a small wagon train from Fort Sandiman, and a courier with orders from Colonel Bromley. These were brief and to the point. The Indians were to be pursued with unflagging zeal, and overtaken, if possible, before they could reach the Bad Lands.

That night the field column under Major Dallas—now sixteen troops strong—slept peacefully at the junction of the two streams. At daybreak they were off on the Indian trail, every man well provided with ammunition and rations. And Corporal Osborne, as he rode with his troop, made a vow that it would not be his fault if he failed to win a higher grade in the coming campaign. Had he known what was before him his reflections would have been as gloomy as they now were bright.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MYSTERIOUS COLUMN OF SMOKE.

The narrative of the battalion's march for six days after leaving the rendezvous could hardly be called a campaign, nor would it afford interesting reading. The two great tribes of Sioux, under Gray Fox and Flying Thunder, played the same tricky game they had played so often before. In widely scattered parties—which made a battle impossible—they pushed through the Bad Lands and along the southern edge of the Black Hills, leaving death and destruction in their wake, and killing or driving away all the game.

The savage and impatient troopers pushed on from day to day, their faces to the foe, and their backs to civilization and the forts. They were soon beyond the reach of dispatches and couriers, and hopelessly remote from the wagon train. The grass was scorched off the prairie, and there was slight sustenance for the horses. The men's rations began to get low, and then the September rains added to the general misery and discomfort.

Not an Indian was to be seen—only many and scattered trails that zig-zagged this way and that, or described semi-circular loops, but always trending toward the northwest. This line of retreat precluded the possibility of another column heading off the Sioux from in front, and, as Major Dallas expressed it to his men, "they had to go it alone."

But it was almost certain that unseen spies were hanging about, and so the battalion had to be wary in the mat-

ter of separating. It stuck closely together, as a rule, but occasionally a couple of troops would diverge right or left to follow a lively-looking trail. But in these cases the trail was invariably lost after a few hours, and the detachment had to return to the main column.

There had been no time to warn the few and scattered inhabitants of this desolate region, and so the Indians found victims here and there for their vengeance. Day after day, while on the march, the troopers would halt to view the scalped and mutilated bodies of a settler and his family, and the cold ashes of their humble cabin; or they would discover, in some hollow of the plains, a slain teamster lying by the side of his shattered and half-burned wagon.

When the reveille rang at daybreak on the seventh morning, and waked the slumbering camp to life, the prospect was as gloomy as it well could be. Tobacco and rations were nearly exhausted. The men were haggard and hungry, and the horses weak and dejected. The battalion was now two hundred miles from the nearest post. A drizzling rain was falling, and far in the rear the peaks of the Black Hills rose faintly above the gray and murky horizon. Eighty miles in front—farther than the eye could reach—were the rugged ranges of the Big Horn Mountains in Montana.

But orders were orders, and every man and officer knew what was expected of him. The Sioux must be overtaken if it took a month, and Major Dallas' voice was as clear and resolute as ever as he gave the command to march.

For two hours the jaded column trotted forward over the sodden earth, and under the thin, raw drizzle of rain. Then they stumbled on a trail that led due north. In the opinion of the scouts it was but a few hours old, and had been made by from forty to fifty Indians. It was proba-

bly a blind, and intended to draw the column away from the main line of retreat.

But there was another side of the question to be considered, and after a brief hesitation Major Dallas ordered Troop A to swing out of line and follow this trail.

"You may stumble on a big bunch of Sioux, Norman," he said, "and that is a chance not to be missed. Be very wary, and don't let yourself get trapped. And be sure to turn back by two o'clock in the afternoon, at the latest. Head diagonally for our line of march, and try to strike us at Powder River. I expect to reach there by sunset."

"All right, major," assented Captain Norman, and a moment later he and his detachment, accompanied by Lowther, the scout, were riding off at right angles from the main column. Linn exulted in the hope of striking something exciting, but Lieutenant Dimsdale told him that in all likelihood this expedition would prove as much of a wild-goose chase as the ones that had preceded it.

The lieutenant's judgment turned out to be correct, so far as it went. The trail thinned gradually, and after following it for ten miles it disappeared entirely. The Sioux seemed to have scattered in all directions.

True to his instructions, Captain Norman pushed on until two o'clock, and then turned southwest to rejoin the main column. It was still raining, and not a sign of Indians was visible in any direction. The horses were exhausted and the men were hungry and ill tempered.

The troop had pushed wearily on for several miles when the captain suddenly brought his command to a halt, and pointed one hand off to the right. Half a dozen miles to the northwest, over a rolling swell of land, lay a pine-clad range of hills, interspersed with rocky buttes. And from between the two nearest peaks a thick pillar of smoke was curling straight up into the air. The men watched it intently, discussing its meaning in low tones.

"What do you think of it, Lowther?" asked Captain Norman.

"It's a signal of some sort, sir," replied the scout. "It may be settlers or a wagon train asking for help. Or, perhaps, it's meant to lure us into ambush."

"Hardly that," said Captain Norman. "At all events, I'll have to report on it. The troop is about worn out, and if I march them over there we won't get back to the battalion before morning."

"Corporal Osborne," he added, turning sharply around to Linn, "take ten men who have the best horses, and go over there and see what that smoke means. Ten will be enough, for I don't believe there are Indians near in any force. Reconnoitre the ground well as you go along, and don't on any pretext venture into the hills. No matter what you discover, come back at once and report. You will likely overtake us before we rejoin the main column at Powder River. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Linn. "I think I do."

He did not like the task, and he had a lurking suspicion that Captain Norman would be glad to see him get into trouble or disgrace—if nothing worse. He was about to ask that Lowther might accompany him, but he changed his mind and turned away. His choice was limited to privates, and in a short time he had picked out ten men whose steeds seemed the best fitted for a rapid march. Trumpeter Grant asked and received permission to go, and this swelled the number to a dozen.

Meanwhile, Captain Norman's order had created some surprise among the troopers, who felt that the party was entirely too small, and that it was going on a doubtful and dangerous mission. Some, who knew how matters stood, may have entertained the same suspicions that Linn had; but the only man who dared to venture a word on the subject was Lieutenant Dimsdale. Disregarding the cap-

tain's stare of angry surprise, he rode alongside of the lad and said, in a low tone:

"I hope you'll come back all right, Osborne. Your orders sound plain enough, but they may not be easy to follow. Keep a lookout to right and left, and don't let any Indians get between you and us."

"Thanks!" replied Linn. "I'll watch sharp."

A moment later the little detachment rode over the swell of ground to the northwest, and lost sight of the rest of the troop as it trotted on to the southwest. The men were silent, and kept their eyes fixed on the distant pillar of smoke.

For four miles the route led over open and level ground, where it was easy to guard against the appearance of Indians. Then low, bare hills closed in on both sides, and Linn, mindful of his orders, sent Trumpeter Grant to the ridge on the right and Private Reily to the one on the left, both to ride parallel with the main body, and watch for signs of danger.

All went well for the next mile and a half, and now the low and barren hills, at a distance of several hundred yards ahead, could be seen to merge into the woodshed and rocky walls of a deep ravine. From some place beyond this the smoke had been rising, but it was no longer visible.

Remembering that it was forbidden to enter the ravine, Linn checked his steed, and gave the word to halt. Just then a rifle-shot broke the stillness, and Private Reily was seen to swerve his horse and gallop down from the ridge on the left. At the same instant Trumpeter Grant came tearing after his comrades from the opposite side loudly sounding the danger call.

CHAPTER XXV.

LURED TO DESTRUCTION.

Linn could not doubt the meaning of the shot and the bugle blast, and with a face from which nearly every vestige of color had fled, he waited in the saddle for his two skirmishers to join him. But he was cool and clear-headed enough—so much so that his older and more experienced men—who were themselves not a little scared—were struck by their young officer's brave demeanor.

The trumpeter was the first to reach the party, and as he checked his steed with a jerk, he uttered the single word "Indians."

Just then Reily came dashing up.

"We're trapped, corporal," he cried, hoarsely. "The whole Sioux nation is closing in on us. They fired at me from long range, and it was a darned good shot, too. I heard the ball whistle."

"Where are they?" demanded Linn. "And how many? Come, men, we must do our best to get away. The way by which we came is open yet, and if we make a rapid dash——"

"Too late!" shouted Grant. "There they come! Look there, and there, and back yonder!"

It was too true, and what the men now saw as they glanced around them was enough to sicken the stoutest heart. The low, open valley was at least six hundred yards wide, and the crests of the two ridges seemed suddenly to grow alive with Indians. On foot and on horse-

back they started into sight, outlined sharply against the gray sky-line. Back behind the troopers—in the direction that led to safety and the main column—the braves were swarming down into the valley from both sides.

"This is terrible," groaned Linn, "but it's not my fault. I took all the precautions I could."

"That's right, corporal," cried Private Stokes. "You're not to blame."

"Of course not," echoed Grant. "You sent Reily and me to reconnoitre on both flanks, and the major himself would have done no more with so small a party. But I swear I don't know where the Sioux came from. They must have been lying low in the little hollows and bushes beyond the ridge to the right."

"And it was the same way over on the left," cried Reily. "The devils let us ride well past before they showed themselves. It was a cleverly planned trap, and that smoke was meant to lead us into it."

"And we're in sure enough," said a trooper, while two others long and loudly cursed Captain Norman.

"None of that, men," Linn sternly commanded. "This is no time for blame or censure. We're in a bad scrape, and I confess I don't see much show for saving our scalps. But if there's any chance at all it's to make a dash for the ravine, and find a sheltered place where we can stand a siege till help comes. I know I was ordered not to enter, but under the circumstances——"

"There may be more of the devils hidden up in there, sir," interrupted Dawnay, one of the oldest of the troopers, "and they'd like nothing better than to lure us in among the rocks and timber, where we wouldn't even be able to fire a decent shot. They know that if we make a stand here a lot of them will bite the dust before they finish us."

"But in the end every man of us will be shot," replied

Linn. "The ravine is the only hope, whether there are more Indians there or not. In one way their plan has miscarried, for I have no doubt they counted on luring the whole troop into the trap. Now that they have only got part of us, they can't help but know that the rest of the detachment will come to our relief. If we can find good shelter and hold it for a few hours, we'll be all right."

"It will take more than a few hours," muttered Grant. "What can the troop do with such a horde? It will need the whole column."

During the brief time that this conversation was going on, and while the little handful of troopers sat huddled in the saddle, the Sioux had gathered more thickly on both ridges. Now those who had poured down into the valley from behind began to ride forward, yelling and whooping at the top of their voices.

As yet the braves on the two crests sat quietly looking on, and without making any move to descend the slopes. The heads of their two lines reached only to points opposite the troopers, and this fact—the leaving of a line of retreat open—indicated pretty clearly that they wanted to lure the little detachment into the ravine.

So it appeared to Linn, and at this trying moment the young corporal thought far less of his own danger than of the responsibility that rested on his shoulders. His duty was not to think of himself, but to do his utmost to save his men.

"We can't be worse off in the ravine than here," he said, after a brief hesitation, "and we may find shelter there. I'm going to take the chances, men."

Half a dozen voices warmly approved this plan, and at the word of command the troopers spurred their horses to a gallop and dashed up the remaining part of the open valley.

The whole horde of surrounding Sioux now began to

yell with well-simulated anger, pretending to fear that their victims were about to escape. Those behind rode on at the top of their speed, firing shot after shot. The Indians on the two ridges numbered several hundred, and these took good care to let the troopers get well past them. Then, from right and left they came diagonally down the slopes in pursuit, whooping and screeching, and emptying their rifles in one incessant volley.

Faster and faster sped the little detachment, with the bullets whistling on all sides of them. In the first hundred yards of the race no one was hit, and soon the low, bare ridges to right and left rose up to meet the wooded and rocky heights of the two mountainous peaks. Between the latter, and gratefully near at hand, yawned the deep, dark, gorge, its trough choked with timber and bushes except for a narrow belt on both sides of a tiny stream that trickled through the middle.

But now the yelling Sioux were pressing close on the rear, and scores of rifles were flashing and cracking. At the very mouth of the ravine two of Linn's men fell simultaneously, and as the party halted it was seen that the poor fellows were dead.

There was no time to save their scalps. The troopers wheeled about, and with cool aim fired a volley that staggered the foe, and brought more than one brave out of the saddle. Another volley, and then they went galloping clumsily up the ravine, leaving the dead behind.

The horses slipped and stumbled in the bed of the stream and on the rugged banks, and Linn soon gave the order to dismount. In a trice the men were out of the saddle, and after two more volleys, they pushed on in search of shelter. A lively fire was poured into them by the hotly pursuing Indians. Two horses fell, and an instant later Private Drew was shot through the hip and lungs. His comrades dragged him along until he

breathed his last, and then they dropped him. The men were now half crazy with rage, and as they stumbled on up the gloomy ravine, they kept firing back with such deadly effect that the Sioux were held at a distance.

"This is awful," cried Linn. "I don't see any hope for us. All we can do is fight to the last and die like soldiers."

"We'll do that, sir," shouted Dawnay, as he aimed his carbine. "Give it to 'em, comrades!"

"Be on your guard, corporal," said the trumpeter, as he pushed forward alongside of Linn. "I'm afraid there's an ambush ahead. I wouldn't venture much further."

"We've got to find shelter, if it's a possible thing," Linn replied. "I won't give up hope, Grant. We'll push on a bit yet, and——"

"Yonder is a likely spot, sir," interrupted Reily. "What do you think of it?"

He pointed to the rugged and pine-covered cliff that rose a hundred and fifty feet in air beyond the intervening slope of scrub, saplings, and loose stones on the right of the gorge. Ten feet above it's base was what looked to be a natural and jutting parapet, with a roomy recess behind it extending under the overhanging ledges above.

"It's not a bad place, from what we can see of it," cried Linn. "If we can once get up there in safety——"

As he spoke a savage burst of yells rang from the thicket twenty feet up the stream, and from that hidden ambush a score of rifles were fired at the unsuspecting little party. Private Harris dropped dead, shot through the head, and two others were wounded.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GALLANT DEFENSE.

This unexpected fire, which showed that foes were in front as well as behind, almost demoralized the troopers. As the smoke drifted down on them they huddled together in confusion, not knowing which way to turn, and seeing no enemies to shoot at. Linn alone retained his presence of mind, and was equal to the emergency. His voice rang clearly above the whooping of the Indians and the neighing and trampling of the frightened horses.

"Steady, there, men," he cried. "Wait till the smoke lifts, and then give them a volley in front. Now's your chance—fire where you see the bushes move."

The corporal's command was instantly obeyed. The smoke had partly risen, revealing the thicket where the Sioux lay in ambush. The Indians were recklessly showing themselves here and there amid the bushes, and with cool and steady aim, the troopers fired shot after shot.

This rather staggered the foe, and the intermittent volley that they sent back did no damage. Then the thick smoke settled down along the channel of the stream, and for a moment the combatants were hidden from one another's view. Linn turned to look toward the mouth of the gorge, and a rapid glance showed him that the main body of the Sioux were coming on swiftly.

"Now's our chance, men," he shouted. "A quick dash will save us. Make for the rocky ledge up yonder on the cliff. Don't forget the wounded—take them along. You lead the way, Dawnay. Grant and I will cover the rear."

No time was lost in executing this order. Harris was dead, and the body was left where it had fallen. The two wounded, Bent and Hiester, were picked up as tenderly as the hurried flight would permit. Led by Dawnay, the little handful of troopers plunged into the tangle of stones and bushes to the right of the stream and scrambled in hot haste for the cliff.

The ambushed Indians were now tumbling out of cover twenty feet up the valley, and half a hundred yelling braves were swarming forward from the opposite direction. The abandoned horses were galloping this way and that through the scattering curls of smoke.

Linn and the trumpeter had halted on the edge of the bushes, and they took in the situation at a glance. Each fired three or four shots out of his carbine at the approaching foes, and then they turned and vanished in the thicket.

For the present they were safe, though the bullets whistled thickly around them. With great strides, they leaped over stones and through the scrub, and overtook their comrades at the base of the cliff.

For ten feet up to the place of shelter the rock was sloping and afforded plenty of footholds. Private Dawnay had already climbed to the ledge, and without a thought of personal danger, he leaned down and took hold of the two wounded men as they were pushed up to him.

Meanwhile the fire of the Indians had ceased, and they did not seem to be making much of an effort to pursue. As yet they had not observed the ledge, nor did they suspect the purpose of the troopers. Evidently they believed that the little party were making a last stand in the bushes, and could be picked off and slaughtered at leisure.

So, with Dawnay's aid, the two wounded men were hauled up to the ledge and put out of harm's way. Then

the rest started to follow, and just at that instant the Sioux down in the open caught sight of them and saw what was intended.

A score of rifles began to crack, and as the troopers swarmed nimbly up the face of the rock they found themselves under a heavy fire. But so quick were their movements, that all gained the ledge in safety except Private Wilson. He, poor fellow, was shot through the head and body just as he reached the top. With his death-cry on his lips he fell backward, landing heavily in the bushes below.

"He's past help," shouted Linn. "We've got enough to do to look out for ourselves now, men. Drop down and keep out of sight."

The panting and breathless troopers sank on their hands and knees, but not to remain long inactive. The first glance around showed them that they possessed a most admirable place of defense. They were on an oblong platform about twelve feet long by eight in width, which reached back like a cavern under the overhanging face of the cliff. The front of it was semi-circular in shape, and was protected all along its open edge by a natural parapet of rock about a foot and half high.

This parapet was broken in several places, and the first thing the men did was to stop up the gaps with some loose slabs of stone that lay within reach. Then they loaded their carbines and crouched warily under cover, peeping down into the valley through what tiny crevices they could find.

The firing had now ceased, and not an Indian was to be seen along the trough of the ravine—which was in plain view. Several of the horses were wandering aimlessly about, and an incessant movement of the bushes on the further side of the stream told that the Sioux were creeping up the valley in force. Drew and Harris lay

among the rocks where they had fallen, and even at this distance it could be seen that the bodies of the poor fellows had been scalped. It was a maddening sight, and the troopers forgot their own peril in a thirst for vengeance.

"The devils are moving thick over yonder in the bushes," muttered Dawnay. "If we open a steady fire we're sure to drop a few of 'em. What do you say, sir?"

"No, it won't do," replied Linn. "Don't waste any cartridges. We may need them all before long."

"That's right, sir," said Grant. "This quiet means mischief. The Sioux are bound to have our scalps, and it won't be their fault if they don't get them."

For the next half-hour there was no change in the situation. The stillness of death brooded over the valley, except for the low murmur of the stream. A drizzling rain fell from the murky clouds, and the thick, gray mist drooped lower and lower.

Linn's thoughts were as gloomy as the scene around him. He knew that he and his comrades had but a slim chance for their lives, and he realized vaguely that in the event of a rescue there would be trouble of another sort in store for him.

"I'm not to blame for what has happened," he reflected, "but it won't be easy to clear myself. I obeyed orders as long as it was possible to do so, and then I had to assume the responsibility of entering the gorge. If I hadn't done that every man of us would be lying dead and scalped now. I half believe that Captain Norman wanted me to get into a scrape, and he'll charge me with the death of all these poor fellows. Instead of getting a higher grade than corporal, I'm likely to be reduced to the ranks."

The young officer certainly had cause to feel heart-sick. Out of the twelve troopers who had ridden away from the detachment only five had escaped death or injury—Linn

himself, Trumpeter Grant, and Privates Dawnay, Reily, and Pomfret. Two were wounded, and five were dead. Harker and Marsh lay at the mouth of the valley, Drew and Harris lay down in the bed of the stream, and the body of Wilson was at the foot of the cliff.

Of the wounded, Bent's case was hopeless. The man was shot through the lungs, and nothing could be done for him. He was lying in a state of semi-consciousness in a far corner of the ledge, groaning from time to time and stirring restlessly. But Hiester was only shot through the thigh, and the plucky fellow had insisted on being placed behind the parapet, where he could lift himself on his elbow and shoot if his services should be needed.

"Corporal, don't look so down-hearted," said Grant, who was lying next to the young officer and had observed his dejection. "It's a pity we've lost so many brave fellows, but the same thing has happened over and over again. And the rest of us are safe enough. This place is almost impregnable, and we can hold it until help comes. There are six of us, counting Hiester, and all good shots."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Linn answered, wearily. "You know——"

"Yes, I know what's on your mind," said Grant. "Every one of us understands that Captain Norman hates you, and you won't lack for witnesses to clear you if he dares to charge you with blame. Why, it's not your fault at all. On the contrary, you've behaved like an old soldier, and the men are astonished at your bravery and pluck. It's due entirely to you that any of us are alive now. If any one gets hauled over the coals it will be Norman himself. He had no business to send out so small a party. A plain case of negligence, I call it, and you can bet your boots——"

"Corporal," Dawnay interrupted, in a sharp whisper,

"there's a good deal of rustling down yonder in the thicket. I reckon the Indians have crossed the stream above and below and then joined forces. We're going to ketch it now, if I ain't mistaken."

"Get ready, then, men," Linn replied. "Each one of you see that he has a loophole to fire from. Are your rifles and pistols all loaded?"

Every man answered yes, and before more could be said the foe made a dash up the wooded slope of the valley. To right and left and in front the scrub grew alive with dusky, squirming forms. With hideous yells at least three score of painted warriors came leaping to the very base of the cliff, eager for the blood of the little party of troopers.

"Steady, now," cried Linn. "Aim well and low. Fire!"

Crash! Out blazed the rifle volley, and more than one brave bit the dust. Crash! crash! Two more charges in quick succession plowed gaps in the dense ranks of the foe. They wavered and staggered.

"Once more!" shouted Linn.

And as the cool and alert troopers rained lead down the sloping rock, themselves protected by the parapet from the return fire, the Sioux were fairly checked.

With hoarse cries of rage and anguish, the baffled braves broke right and left, and went back to the shelter of the stones and bushes, dismayed to find themselves repulsed by a mere handful of soldiers. A dozen dead and wounded lay near the cliff, and those able to stir were seen wriggling away like serpents.

With hoarse cheers, the troopers rose recklessly to their feet and emptied rifles and revolvers after the fleeing foe. Then, at Linn's command, they dropped under cover again in time to escape a volley from the Indians who lay in ambush to right and left of the scene of action.

A brief lull followed, which gave the men time to reload. Then the infuriated Indians made a second attack, and in larger numbers. They struggled desperately to swarm up the face of the cliff, but all in vain. The heavy and incessant fire from the loopholes of the parapet, poured slantingly down upon them, was more than they could stand. With a loss of nearly a score, they melted away as quickly as they had come, and deep silence settled on the gloomy gorge.

"That was lively work," said Dawnay, as he wiped his perspiring face, "and there ain't one of us hit."

"I had a close shave," replied Private Reily. "A bullet struck alongside of my head and threw chips in my eyes."

"And I've got a ball through the fleshy part of my left arm," added Private Pomfret, "but it won't keep me from firing."

"It was a gallant fight, men," said Linn, "and we should be thankful that we are all alive. I think we are safe now. The Indians have been taught a lesson, and I don't believe they will attempt another assault in a hurry."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN ERRAND OF MERCY.

The day was now nearly ended, and the murky sky was beginning to fade before the approach of twilight. With gloomy hearts, the besieged troopers watched the darkness gather on the little valley below them, until the outline of every tree and rock was blurred from sight. Not a sound but the murmur of the stream broke the stillness. There was nothing to indicate that a couple of hundred blood-thirsty Indians were lurking in the vicinity.

Incessant vigilance was the price of safety, and the weary men neither dared to sleep, nor to venture away from their posts. With loaded carbines and revolvers at hand, they crouched behind the parapet, straining their eyes to peer into the gloom below, and listening for the slightest noise that might mean danger.

Thus a couple of hours slipped by. Fortunately the troopers did not suffer from hunger, for their haversacks contained a small supply of rations. It was enough for one meal, and the food was divided and eaten in silence. There was no water to wash it down with, for the canteens had long since been drained. Linn's had held out the longest, but instead of drinking himself, he poured the last drops between Bent's burning lips. The young officer and his men were now tormented by thirst, but as there was no remedy, they did not complain.

The water was as good as wasted on poor Bent. He was still unconscious and breathing painfully, and there

was little chance of his living through the night. Hies-ter, the other wounded trooper, had taken a turn for the worse, and was no longer able to share in the defense. The ball was imbedded in his thigh, and the wound was badly inflamed. His comrades had carried him to the rear of the parapet, and he lay on the hard bed of rock, tossing from side to side, and babbling to himself in the delirium of fever. Linn frequently crept back to the suffering men, in hopes of being able to do something for them. He had bandaged the wounds as well as he could, and had tied up Pomfret's arm. The latter made light of his hurt, though it was giving him not a little pain.

"Don't you worry about me, corporal," he said. "I'm all right. Luckily it's my left arm, and though I can't easily handle a carbine, I can manage a revolver well enough with my right hand."

"I hope there won't be any more fighting," Linn replied. "The Sioux know that they can't catch us napping, and it's only a question of holding out until relief comes."

"About what time is it, corporal?" asked Dawnay. "Have you any idea?"

"It must be close to nine o'clock," said Linn, "and that's what puzzles me. Surely by this time——"

"Hist! listen to that," interrupted Reily.

As he spoke the hoot of an owl rang from some distance up the gorge, and it was quickly followed by the weird bark of a coyote, down by the mouth of the valley. The sounds were repeated several times.

"What do you make out of that, men?" Linn questioned. "You know I'm not well booked on frontier woodcraft. Is it a real owl hooting and a genuine coyote barking? It sounds so to me."

"That's a hard question to answer, sir," replied Daw-

may. "The redskins are so good at imitatin' birds and beasts that it ain't easy to tell one from the other. As like as not what we hear are Indian signals. There they go again."

"You're right, Dawnay," said Grant. "The Sioux are up to some devilment, but I don't think we need be afraid of an attack. They seldom, if ever, do any fighting at night. The signaling has a different meaning."

"It won't do to be sure of that," said Pomfret. "The Indians know that we're bound to be relieved pretty soon, and they may try to rush us again under cover of the darkness."

"That brings me back to what I was asking you about the time, corporal," put in Dawnay. "You said you reckoned it was close to nine o'clock. Well, if that's the case, Captain Norman and the rest of the troop should have been here before this."

"Yes, hours ago," assented Grant.

"I know that," replied Linn, "and I can't account for it. Of course the captain intended to push on after the main column, but after hearing the firing, he would have turned back to our relief. Why, he should have been here before dark. And he must have heard our shots."

"I'm afraid he didn't, sir," said Dawnay. "You see, the wind was blowing from the wrong direction, and we were seven or eight miles apart at the least."

"Then you think the detachment has gone on to join the main column?" Linn exclaimed.

Dawnay nodded.

"That's about it, sir."

"And I'm of the same opinion, corporal," added Grant. "The situation is just this. By sunset the captain's party would likely have joined Major Dallas at Powder River, and our not coming in soon afterward would show that something was wrong. Then the major would send

three or four troops to our relief. They must have started right after sundown, and it's ten to one that they are miles on their way by now."

"And what time ought they to arrive here?" asked Linn.

"It's hard to say," Grant replied, "for you know the horses are all pretty badly knocked out. But if they ride their level best—and I'm sure they will—they ought to reach the mouth of the valley two or three hours after midnight."

"Then we've got a difficult piece of work to do, and one that we dare not shirk," exclaimed Linn, sitting upright in his excitement. "By Jove, men, don't you see what will happen? Three troops, or even four, are no match in craft for the Indians. The Sioux are two or three hundred strong, and they know that help is on the way. They won't bother any more about taking our few scalps. Instead of that, they will form an ambuscade behind both ridges that cover the approach to the valley. The cavalry will push into it and be surrounded and cut to pieces. At least, that's what will happen if we don't prevent it."

It was strange that no one had thought of this before, and now that Linn had suggested it to his men, they began to discuss the question eagerly. All were agreed on one thing; namely, that the Sioux would certainly attempt to ambuscade the relief force in the natural trap beyond the mouth of the gorge. The simulated cries of the owl and coyote were likely signals to that effect.

But there was some difference of opinion as to whether the force would be easily trapped. Grant held that Captain Norman would be in command, and that he would take every precaution to guard against a surprise. But Dawnay was less sanguine. He predicted that the troopers would expect no danger outside of the gorge itself—

especially in the night time, and that they would be surrounded and butchered.

Linn listened patiently to what the men had to say, but he was not to be turned from what he regarded as his duty.

"Theories are not going to help us any," he said, "and they need not be considered. The fact is that the force will arrive between midnight and dawn, and that it runs a tremendous risk of being cut to pieces. There are three or four hours to spare yet, and in that time one of us must reach the open country beyond the valley, intercept the relief column, and warn it of the danger. And I shall be the one to go."

"You can't do it, sir," Grant said, bluntly. "It's sure death. You can't creep out of the valley either way without being discovered and shot."

"I tell you it's got to be done," Linn replied, sharply, "and there's an end of it. I was always a good climber, and I have an idea I can scale this cliff behind us. There are plenty of grips for the feet and hands."

"That might be done, sir," said Dawnay. "I'm too heavy a man, or I'd try it myself. And how are the rest of us to be relieved in case you reach the force? It won't be an easy matter."

"It will be done somehow, depend on that," replied Linn. "If the troops avoid falling into an ambuscade they will either fight their way up the valley from in front, or circle around in the rear. If you hold out till morning you will be relieved."

Just then Hiester's incoherent babblings turned to a pitiful appeal for water, and Linn and Grant crept over to the wounded man. He was tossing restlessly in the throes of fever and clutching at the empty air.

"I'm burning up," he moaned. "I'm dying of thirst. For Heaven's sake give me water—only a drop."

"Poor fellow! he'll have to do without it," muttered Grant. "There's not a drop in the party."

"He shan't suffer for want of it," said Linn, with sudden determination. "I'll get him a drink."

"It will cost you your life," remonstrated Grant. "Don't try it, sir. It's madness."

"I'm not afraid," Linn replied. "There are not likely to be any Indians between here and the stream, and they don't dream of any of us venturing down from the ledge. I'll be back with the water in a couple of minutes, and then I'll have a try at the cliff."

The men earnestly attempted to dissuade Linn from his rash purpose, but he was determined to carry out his errand of mercy. He pulled off his boots, and put a revolver in one pocket and his canteen in the other. Then he softly and noiselessly lowered himself from the ledge and vanished in the dark thicket at the bottom.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A. PERILOUS CLIMB.

Linn knew pretty well what he was about. He had hurriedly weighed the chances for and against the success of his errand, and he was satisfied that vigilance and caution would pull him through safely. He had every reason to think the ledge was not under surveillance at present, and that no Indians were in the immediate vicinity. He also had a deeper and secret purpose in view other than the procuring of water for the wounded man.

His heart almost failed him for a moment, as he found himself crouching at the foot of the ledge. Behind him were his comrades and shelter, while in front was a sheet of blackness that might or might not abound with peril.

"I've got to do it," he reflected. "I can't shirk my plain duty. So here goes."

He listened a second or two, but could detect nothing alarming. Then he crept slowly forward on his hands and knees, taking every precaution to avoid touching loose stones or dried twigs. On and on he went with the craft and cunning of a serpent, guided in his course by the faint tinkle of the rivulet down in the trough of the ravine.

It was wearisome work, and he was constantly beset by the fear that his beating heart would betray him, or that some brawny foe would pounce upon him unawares. Twice he stopped short, terrified by sounds that he believed to be Indian signals—the hooting of an owl and the shrill bark of a coyote.

With bruised and scratched limbs, he dragged himself on through the tangle of rocks, bushes, and trees, and at last the perilous journey ended in safety. With a thankful heart, he halted on the edge of the stream, at a spot where the water formed a little eddy between two jutting boulders. A leafy thicket overhung, and through it he could see dimly across the channel to the opposite side of the valley.

It was the work of a moment for Linn to noiselessly fill the canteen and put it back in his pocket. But he did not at once start on his return journey. Instead, he crouched down in the shelter of the boulders and watched and listened keenly.

For five minutes there was not a sound but the murmur of the flowing water; even the simulated cries of the owl and coyote—if such they were—had ceased entirely. Then, finally, the young officer's patience was rewarded.

His eyes were accustomed to the darkness by this time, and in the semi-gloom he saw dusky figures slipping past him on the farther side of the rocky channel. In groups of five and six they came in sight from up the gorge and vanished hurriedly in the direction of the lower outlet. Not a word was spoken, and the moccasined feet made no sound, except when a dry twig was stepped upon.

"Just as I supposed!" Linn said to himself. "It's easy to guess what that means. Well, I've gained one thing by creeping down here. I know now what I've got to do, and the sooner I get at it, the better."

At least three score of Indians had passed him by this time, and they were still on their noiseless march down the valley. He did not wait to see how many more were to come. He turned away from the stream and started back up the rugged slope, moving with greater speed and ease, now that he knew the vicinity to be free from enemies.

Nearly half an hour had elapsed since Linn's departure, and when he reached the base of the ledge, eager hands were outstretched to haul him over the parapet, and he was welcomed as one from the dead.

"Thank heaven you're safe!" whispered Dawnay. "We'd given you up, sir. We thought the redskins had finished you with a knife-thrust."

"This is the pluckiest deed I've known since I came on the frontier, corporal," said Grant, "and I've seen a good bit of active service."

"It had to be done," Linn replied, briefly, "and I was sure I could do it. Wait a moment——"

He crept over to Hiester and poured a long drink of the cool water down his parched throat. He also gave Bent a portion, and then handed the canteen to Dawnay.

"You fellows divide the rest among you," he said.

"After you, sir," replied the trooper. "We have no claim on it."

"No, I took a drink down at the stream," Linn answered, "and I won't need any more for the present. When I do I will find a way to get it. And now who will volunteer to accompany me? There's no time to lose, and I want to start as soon as possible——"

"You're still bent on climbing the cliff, sir?" interrupted Grant.

"More than ever," said Linn, "and I'll tell you why. The Sioux are pushing down the ravine in force, and that means that they are getting ready to waylay the relief party when it comes. There is no longer any doubt about it, and my duty is plain."

This information surprised and startled the men, and after hearing Linn's account of what he had seen, all were agreed that something must be done to save the command that was doubtless now on its way to the valley.

"A couple of good climbers can scale the cliff," said Linn, as he glanced up at the towering mass of rock; "I am sure of that. None of you can well be spared, and yet it is important that one man shall go with me. Then, if anything happens to either of us, the other will have a chance to escape and warn the soldiers. But it's got to be of your own free will. Are any of you ready to face the danger and the climb?"

Every man of the little party volunteered at once, and it looked as though a choice would be difficult. But after a little reflection, Linn saw that the matter could be decided only in one way.

"Dawnay is too heavily built to climb with safety," he said, "and of course Pomfret's wounded arm puts him out of the running. And Grant must be left here in charge. Reily, how are you at climbing?"

"I can scale almost anything, sir," the trooper answered, "and that cliff yonder ain't much compared to what I've done in my time. Just try me."

"I will," said Linn. "You're the man I want. Now, Grant, I'm going to turn my responsibility over to you. I don't think there's danger of another attack to-night, but you had better watch sharp. If we succeed in joining the relief force—and I think we will—you will almost certainly be rescued by morning. If help comes a little late you'll have to fight hard. But I'm sure you can pull through. Take care of the wounded, and if anything happens to me, remember that I did my duty, and stuck to orders as well as I could."

"I'll do that, sir," the trumpeter replied, earnestly. "I and my comrades will answer for it that no false charges will be allowed to stain your good name. But don't talk about going under, corporal. You'll live to see many a fight yet."

"And may you soon be with us again, sir," added

Dawnay. "But ain't there a safer way for it than to climb that dizzy precipice?"

"No, that's the only outlet," Linn replied. "The valley down below is full of Indians, and there are certainly a good many left on guard above. If we tried to escape in either direction we would be discovered and shot. Come, Reily, it's getting on toward midnight, and what we have to do will require considerable time."

A brief and affecting scene followed. Low whispered farewells were said, and the three troopers who were to stay behind clasped the hands of the two comrades who were starting on a mission of grave peril. Then, each with a brace of loaded revolvers in his belt, Linn and Reily pulled themselves to a narrow ledge shortly above the left-hand corner of the parapet, and from there gained a strip of bushes and pine-shoots still higher up.

The trying task was now fairly begun, and the daring climbers were speedily concealed from the eyes of their watching comrades below. With steady nerves and unerring skill, they mounted higher and higher, seeking holds for feet and hands with the quickness and agility of wild goats.

The darkness of the night proved both a help and a hindrance, for while it screened them from the view of keen-eyed Indians, it added to the difficulty of choosing a safe and speedy path. By daylight a nimble and strong-headed schoolboy might have scaled the cliff without much risk. It sloped upward at a slight angle, and its face was scored with knobs of rock and zig-zag crevices and partly covered with tough grass and scrub and stunted pine trees.

"Don't look down," Linn whispered to his companion, after he had incautiously let himself catch a glimpse of the yawning gulf below. "Be careful to keep your eyes in front."

"All right, sir," replied Reily. "I'm too old a climber to look any other way. We've made out well so far. Why, we're half way to the top already. But there's another thing we must guard against, sir, and that's dislodging any good-sized stones. These little bits of gravel and clay that go rattling down don't count for much, but a big noise will tell the Sioux what we're up to, and then we'll likely find some of them waiting for us at the top."

"That's true," assented Linn. "We must be mighty careful, Reily. If we try every root and bit of rock there's not much danger of dislodging anything large."

With one or the other alternately taking the lead, the young officer and his companion steadily ascended higher and higher up the dizzy face of the precipice, veering off to right or left at times, turning awkward corners, and taking advantage of every hold that offered.

The upper portion of the cliff was by far the most perilous and difficult, and the final fifty feet taxed their nerves and courage to the utmost. Bits of stone and dirt rattled down at intervals from under foot, but by incessant caution nothing large enough to attract the attention of the Sioux was dislodged. The plucky climbers had several narrow shaves that nearly took their breath away, and once they actually crawled up eight feet of overhanging rock by clinging to projections and crevices.

Meanwhile the horizon line of timber overhead was drawing steadily nearer, and at last the surface of the precipice terminated at a gentle and grassy slope. Up this Linn and Reily crawled on hands and knees, and sank down panting and exhausted in the dark shelter of the pine trees on top of the ridge. The first and worst portion of their journey was safely accomplished.

After resting just long enough to recover breath, they

crossed the ridge and pushed down the slope on the opposite side. This fell away at a gentle angle, and though it was rugged with stones and tangled timber, the young officer led on at a rapid rate of speed.

"It don't matter if we make a little noise, Reily," he said. "There are surely no Indians about to hear it, and the main thing with us just now is to gain time. You see, we've got to cover a good deal of ground before we can strike a safe place to lie in wait for the relief force."

"Right you are, sir," replied Reily, "but we'd best go a bit cautious. This is just the sort of a trap to break a man's legs."

However, no bones were broken in spite of frequent falls, and a half-hour of stumbling and sliding down hill brought them safely to a narrow ravine. Here they turned southward and quickly emerged from the timber on the brink of a far-reaching plain. By the dim light it was seen to be almost level and covered with patches of scrub.

To the right was a low ridge running north and south, and Linn pointed to it eagerly.

"That is the continuation of the mountain we just climbed," he whispered, "and beyond it is the valley that leads to the gorge—the same valley by which we approached this afternoon."

"And right in front of us," said Reily, "is where the Sioux were lying when they swarmed up and surrounded us. And I'll bet a hundred of the devils are lurking yonder in the thickets now, and off on the far side of the next valley, waiting to close in on the relief force."

"Yes, that's about it," assented Linn, "and it means that we must make a wide detour to get around this dangerous neighborhood, and then strike to the southeast to meet the soldiers. What do you think?"

"It's the best and only plan, sir," replied Reily, "so here goes."

With their pistols held in readiness for instant use, the two crept forward in a southeasterly direction along the edge of the timbered foothills that bordered the plain, intending to go at least a mile before striking to the south. But they had traveled no more than fifty yards when, on circling around a spur of rock, they made a discovery that was both pleasing and alarming. So near that they could almost be touched, stood two Indian ponies, picketed amid the low grass. Not a Sioux was in sight, and the nearest bushes were twenty feet away.

Private Reily's hair almost stood on end.

"Back, back, sir," he whispered. "Get behind the rock, and then cut for the timber. It'll take scratchin' to save our scalps."

"No—hold on," muttered Linn. "It's too late to do that, for we're likely in a nest of Indians. There's only one thing to do—we must mount the ponies and make a dash for life."

"Corporal, you're either the bravest man that ever lived, or the most foolhardy," said Reily, in a husky tone, and with that he whipped out a knife and severed the lariats that fastened the steeds. He leaped astride the largest pony, and Linn hastily mounted the other.

Just at that instant three dusky figures rose in view from the bushes to one side. Crack! a bullet whistled overhead. Crack! crack! down went Linn's pony with a whinny of pain. Another report—this time from Reily's revolver—and then the trooper was galloping like mad over the dusky plain, believing his comrade to be dead, and thinking only of the duty he must perform.

Stunned and dazed by the fall, Linn rose from the spot where the dying pony had pitched him—rose to see the dusky Sioux braves starting up on three sides of him

and to hear their mad yells of rage. He lifted a revolver in each hand, but before he could pull the triggers, a rifle was fired at close range. He felt a stinging pain in his head, and all consciousness left him as he dropped heavily.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN UNPLEASANT AWAKENING.

It generally takes a man some time to get his thoughts and recollections into lucid shape when he comes back to consciousness after a period of insensibility. It was so with Linn when he wakened to find himself, much to his surprise, still in the land of the living.

On first opening his eyes he believed it to be all a dream, and even when he was convinced otherwise, he was still too dazed and weak to comprehend what it meant.

He was lying on a rude litter, with his head slightly elevated on a pillow fashioned out of a bunch of grass. He was in his stocking feet, trousers, and blue flannel shirt; his boots and jacket were missing.

The litter was made of boughs fastened together with thongs of hide, and it was being borne along with a rapid but easy motion by four stalwart Sioux warriors, each of whom held a corner. In front were a score of braves, some on foot, and some on ponies, and Linn knew by the sound that more Indians were following behind.

The party was pushing on steadily and swiftly, as though fearing pursuit, and at present the course was through a lonely mountain defile. To right and left of the narrow trail towered pine-clad hills and precipitous cliffs. A silvery glimmer, straight overhead in the cloudy sky, marked the location of the sun.

After noticing these things, Linn next discovered that

his head pained him terribly, and that a moist bandage was wrapped around it above his eyes and ears. He carefully inserted a finger under the bandage and found a ragged hole in the centre of a swollen mound of flesh.

The shock of this discovery almost unnerved him for an instant, but he was determined to learn the extent of his injury. So, in spite of the stinging pain, he probed and squeezed the wound until he was satisfied that the skull was neither broken nor fractured.

The effort brought on a spell of faintness and dizziness, and he lay perfectly still for some minutes, with closed eyes. The rest brought a partial return of strength, and after puzzling his brain for a time to account for his present situation, full recollection suddenly burst upon him. He remembered the fighting in the ravine, the climb up the cliff with Reily, and the brief scrimmage out on the verge of the plain.

"Yes, it's all clear now," he reflected. "I was thrown off my pony, and when I got up Reily was galloping off like mad, and the Sioux were closing in on me. A shot brought me down, and after that I remembered nothing. It was a mighty close call for my life, too. The bullet must have struck my forehead and glanced off. I never imagined that I had so hard a skull."

"But why didn't the Indians finish and scalp me, as is their usual custom? That's a hard thing to understand. I would like to know why they kept me alive—not for any good, I'll warrant. And all this happened hours ago," he added, in surprise, as he glanced up at the hidden outlines of the sun. "It must be high noon already. I wish I knew if Reily escaped and warned the relief force in time. And I wonder if the poor fellows up the ravine were rescued."

But there was no answer to be had to these questions, or to the many other things that puzzled the young of-

ficer. He knew that the Indians could not speak his tongue, and that they would give him no information had they been able to do so. He lay still for a time, reflecting on the past and worrying himself not a little about the future. Finally a burning thirst began to torture him, and after enduring it as long as he could, he determined to have a drink.

"Water! water!" he called, raising himself on one elbow, and touching his fingers to his lips.

The two foremost litter-bearers glanced quickly around, and one of them uttered a guttural shout in a loud tone. The effect of this was to bring the leader of the party back to the litter. He was an elderly warrior of superb build, with a grave and dignified face. He was decked out in war paint and barbaric finery, and was mounted on a handsome and spirited horse. There was a huge scar on his chest, and by this sign—which he had heard spoken of in the mess-room at Fort Sandiman—Linn now knew that he was in the presence of Flying Thunder himself, the famous and terrible chief of the Ogallalla Sioux.

"So this is Deerfoot's father!" the lad reflected. "Don't I wish I could speak the Dakota tongue! If Flying Thunder knew what friends Deerfoot and I had been he might let me go, or, at least, he would be likely to protect me from harm."

But Linn did not build any hopes on this, for he knew that an interchange of conversation was impossible. And the great chief was certainly in an angry and revengeful mood to judge from his cruel expression as he glanced keenly at the prisoner.

He halted his braves by a gesture, and gave a few orders in a low tone. A riderless pony was brought forward from the rear, and Linn was roughly transferred to the back of the animal. He was given a drink of water

from an army canteen, and a small quantity of dried meat was poked into his mouth. Then his hands were bound behind him, and his feet were tied together under the pony's belly.

But brief time was lost in this operation. The litter was thrown away, Flying Thunder rode back to the head of his braves, and the whole party moved on again at a rapid speed, one of the Indians leading the prisoner's pony.

Linn heartily wished himself back on the litter again, but after a time his position became less uncomfortable. His head did not pain him so much, and the cool breeze blowing in his face prevented him from becoming faint or dizzy. He could not tell how many Indians were behind him, for when he attempted to look back, a brave who was riding alongside struck him severely in the face. But he judged that the party numbered about fifty, and he made one discovery that gave him very unpleasant sensations. Of the score of warriors who rode in front, at least four had fresh scalps dangling at their belts.

This gave Linn a clew to the situation, and after thinking it over shrewdly, he formed a conclusion that did not leave room for much doubt.

"I'm satisfied now that Reily escaped, and reached the relief party in time," he said to himself, "and what happened afterward is just this. There was a fight in the neighborhood of the ravine, and though the Indians got a few scalps, they were beaten off. Then they broke up in detachments and scattered in different directions. This party is heading for some safe and remote hiding-place in the mountains, and from the speed they are making, it's not likely they will be overtaken by the soldiers. As for my brave comrades up on the ledge—why, by this time they have been rescued, of course. I shouldn't wonder if they had been relieved before daylight."

All this was sound reasoning, as far as it went, but it did not make Linn's hopes any brighter. On the contrary, the situation looked very black indeed to the lad. He was a helpless prisoner on his way to some impenetrable mountain fastness. Reily would report him dead, and, therefore, no special pursuit would be made in his behalf. There was little chance of rescue otherwise, since Flying Thunder and his braves would take good care to keep out of the way of the soldiers.

"The worst of it is, that my life may be in danger," Linn went on to reason. "I believe they hold me responsible for Reily's getting away to warn the troops, and took me prisoner so that they might gratify their revenge at leisure. The Sioux are not much in the habit of torturing white prisoners in these times, but they may make an exception in my case. Well, it won't do any good to think about it, so I'll try to look on the bright side. I may be rescued, or perhaps I will find a chance to escape. And if I get back to my command I'll have witnesses enough to clear me from any false charges Captain Norman may bring."

By such reflections as the above Linn managed to keep up his spirits fairly well as he rode on through the long afternoon. But he suffered terribly from his wound and from his cramped and awkward position, and finally one of his captors had to mount behind him to keep him from falling.

The trail led through deep gorges and over precipitous cliffs, where a misstep would have meant death, and the general direction was to the northwest. Twice smaller parties of Sioux joined Flying Thunder's band from the mountain passes to the south, and just at twilight the whole cavalcade rode down into a little valley surrounded by lofty hills, and with a sparkling river flowing between level grass land.

Across the stream a score of lodges and teepees nestled at the base of the opposite cliff, and from these a swarm of squaws, children, and old men poured out to welcome the returning braves. At sight of Linn they screeched with fury and assailed him with showers of dirt and stones.

But his captors bore the lad safely through the rabble, and placed him, in a fainting condition, within a lodge made of painted skins. His legs and arms were unbound, and he was left to rest on a couch of dried grass.

CHAPTER XXX.

A THRILLING RECOGNITION.

Linn slept soundly all through the night, and when he woke the next morning he felt better and stronger than he had hoped to feel. He was still a little stiff from his long ride, and his head was sore and swollen; but the wound showed signs of healing, and there was no feverish inflammation. The cloudy and rainy weather was over, and a strong wind was blowing. It was already noon, to judge from the sunlight that entered through the smoke-hole in the roof of the lodge.

Linn had not been awake long before a hideous old squaw brought him a bowl of venison broth. He ate this with a keen appetite, and after the squaw's departure, a medicine-man, arrayed in all his fantastic glory, entered the lodge.

But he did not perform any of his outlandish rites and ceremonies. Instead of that he washed the prisoner's wound, and bandaged it skillfully with a paste made of green herbs. The next visitor was Flying Thunder himself. He stalked gravely into the lodge, inspected the lad pretty much as a butcher might size up a plump calf, and then silently departed with the medicine-man.

Linn saw no one else that day, and of the four days that followed, each was more monotonous than the rest. Morning and afternoon the squaw brought him a plentiful meal, and the medicine-man bathed and dressed his wound. The whinnying of the ponies and the voices of the Indian children at play were the only sounds he

heard from outside, and but once did he get a brief glimpse through the flaps of the door-way. Then he saw the lodges scattered about the grassy plain, with the Sioux moving here and there among them, and in the distance the swift and sparkling river, bounded on the farther shore by lofty and timbered hills.

His limbs were not bound, and this showed how safe a prisoner he was. He knew that escape by day was out of the question, and he soon learned that it was equally so at any other time. For on the second night, when he ventured to lift the flaps of skin and peep out, he saw that the lodge was guarded by half a dozen armed warriors.

When the fifth day of his captivity dawned Linn was in a measure resigned, and he was in better spirits than he had been yet. He felt strong and vigorous, and his wound was almost entirely healed, thanks to the skill and attention of the medicine-man.

"It's no fun to be kept in close confinement," he said to himself, "but I ought to be thankful it's no worse. I don't believe my life is in danger, for if the Indians intended to kill me, they would have done it long ago. I wouldn't mind it so much if I knew what the soldiers were doing. As like as not they're still chasing around the country on a vain hunt for the Sioux, and of course they believe me to be dead. It's hard to tell what the outcome of this thing will be, and all I can do is to wait in patience. The Brules and Ogallallas must be split up into a good many parties, to judge from the small force that is here, and as long as they continue those tactics they can avoid the troops. When cold weather comes they will likely go back peaceably to their reservations, and I am sure to be released then—if not before."

But about noon something happened to break the monotony. Eager shouting was heard among the lodges,

and as the sound swelled louder the tramp of horses' hoofs was blended with it. Then the tumult changed to cries of unmistakable rage and lamentation, and these continued in the near vicinity of the lad's place of confinement, making him feel very ill at ease.

"I can guess what it means," Linn reflected, "and I know now why I have seen nothing of Flying Thunder for the past four days. He and some of his braves have been out on a scout, and they have met the whole or a part of Major Dallas' command. They have returned minus a part of their number, and the women and children are mourning for the dead. And they will likely want to make an end of me next. It's not a pleasant prospect."

But the day wore on, and the only person to visit the lodge was the old squaw. Her manner was sullen and spiteful as she put down the food and hurried away. The wailing lasted at intervals until dark, and then sounds of a different nature rose on the night air—guttural shouts, weird and frenzied chanting, and the dismal accompaniments of rattles and tom-toms.

Linn ventured to peep cautiously beneath the front flaps of the lodge. Three Indians were on guard at the very door and beyond them he saw several score of braves dancing and yelling around the blazing fires. Until a late hour he sat up listening to the wild turmoil, oppressed by a feeling of dread that would not be shaken off, and finally he fell asleep from very exhaustion.

It was not a restful slumber, for terrible dreams coursed in quick succession through his troubled brain. From one of these he woke with a start, wet with perspiration and trembling in every limb, to find the bright light of day streaming through the crevices of the lodge.

As he sat up, looking stupidly around him, the door-flaps were pulled aside by two stalwart braves. In silence

they caught hold of the lad, and hurried him roughly into the open air. The sun was an hour high, and a flood of golden light was on the green plain, and the sparkling river, and the wooded heights that towered to meet the sky. The trees and grass rustled in the crisp breeze.

With four score of Indians yelling and dancing around him—men, women and children—Linn was dragged across the plain to the brink of the river, and then bound to a thick stake. The squaws and children were driven a short distance back, and the braves gathered nearer in a half-circle, their partly naked bodies hideous with daubs and streaks of paint, and their faces distorted with rage and hatred.

Up to this time Linn had been too dazed to comprehend what it all meant, but now the awful truth burst upon him with stunning force. He was to be put to death by torture!

In this terrible moment he tried hard to hide his fear, and to show his enemies how a soldier could face death. But his limbs trembled in spite of him, and his cheeks turned ghastly pale. He knew that entreaty or appeal would be worse than useless. He read relentless hatred and cruelty in the glances of the ferocious warriors.

The ordeal was not long delayed. Amid the hoots and jeers of the squaws and the mocking taunts of the men, a circle of dry fagots was built about the stake, reaching almost to the captive's middle. Next a warrior approached with a blazing torch, but just as he was about to ignite the pile, an interruption came.

Flying Thunder stopped the proceeding by a gesture, and then pointed gravely to the south. The eyes of every Sioux followed the chief's outstretched arm, and Linn glanced in the same direction, cheered by a wild hope that help might be coming.

Horsemen were in sight, sure enough, but they did

not wear the blue of Uncle Sam's army. Through the narrow mountain pass by which the river left the valley, scarce fifty yards away, came a score of painted Sioux, mounted on fleet ponies. Nearer and nearer they galloped, shouting and waving their rifles at the band that stood around the doomed captive.

The leader of the party was a tall and youthful warrior, with the build and physique of an Apollo, and with features of more than ordinary gravity and intelligence. His war-bonnet trailed nearly to the ground, and his eyes flashed with exultant pride. At the head of his braves he rode up to Flying Thunder, and checked his pony by a single jerk.

Linn saw the handsome young Sioux and twisted his head to get a better view. For a few seconds he stared, a red flush mounting from cheek to forehead. Then positive recognition banished doubt, and in that moment of tremendous joy and surprise his heart throbbed as though it would burst.

"Deerfoot!" he cried, hoarsely. "Deerfoot, save me!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

LINN'S FELLOW PRISONER.

Linn was not mistaken. The leader of the newly arrived band was indeed Deerfoot—the one-time pupil of the Carlisle Indian School, whose body was supposed to be lying in the underground depths of Alexander's Cave. The stalwart young Sioux turned in the direction of the appealing cry, his proud expression unchanged, except for a slight knitting of the brows. Then he swiftly dismounted from his pony, gave the bridle to Flying Thunder, and gained the side of the white captive by a couple of rapid strides.

"You! Linn Hilliard!" he exclaimed, in a tone that was a mixture of surprise and pleasure. "You here—way out in the West!"

"Yes, I'm here, Deerfoot," Linn answered, "and you've come just in time to save me. They were going to torture me to death—burn me at the stake. You'll help me, won't you? For the sake of old times, use your influence. Flying Thunder is your father, and he'll do what you ask him."

"Me sorry to see you wearing soldier clothes," grunted Deerfoot. "Me hate the blue-coats. My father hate them, and all his tribe. But you were a good friend, Linn. Wait, me see what can do."

He strode back to Flying Thunder, and the two began to converse in low and earnest tones. Linn watched them anxiously, and the surrounding Indians looked on with grave and ominous attention. The suspense was

not of long duration. The old chief lifted one hand, and spoke a few loud words.

As he paused a murmur of dissatisfaction from many of his hearers rose and died away. Then the Sioux who held the burning torch dashed it sullenly to the ground, and two other braves cut the captive loose from the stake.

"Your life is safe, Linn," said Deerfoot, coming forward again. "But you are still a prisoner—me no can set you free. Follow this way. We have a talk together."

Linn had not expected to gain freedom, and the knowledge that he was not to be put to death was enough to make him supremely happy. At Deerfoot's heels he walked swiftly through the crowd of braves, women and children, whose hatred and anger were now confined to scowling looks and low-muttered grunts.

The band of mounted Sioux urged their tired ponies forward from the rear, but Linn did not once glance backward. Had he done so he might have made a most wonderful and thrilling discovery and one that would assuredly have changed his future actions and saved him much sorrow and self-reproach.

Up the grassy slope and in among the huddled tepees pressed the chief's son and his companion, and finally they entered the lodge from which Linn had been dragged a short time before. Deerfoot drew the skins tightly against the entrance. Then, with his brawny arms folded on his naked chest, he stared thoughtfully at the white lad.

"You better stayed at Carlisle," he said, after a long pause.

"It's not my fault that I didn't," Linn replied, "and you'll understand when I tell you the story. But first I want to thank you for saving my life. I'll never forget

it, and I hope to repay you some day. I wonder if you know how it feels to be tied to a stake, ready to be burned to death. It's an awful sensation."

Deerfoot nodded.

"You no burn now," he said. "How you come here, Linn?"

"I'll tell you in a minute, old fellow. How did you come here?—that's what I want to know. I thought you were dead, and every one else thinks the same, both in the East and out here on the plains. I could hardly believe my eyes at first, when you came riding into the camp. I'm awfully glad you're alive, but I don't understand how you escaped."

"Not easy to kill Indian," Deerfoot answered. "Me fall down hole in cavern, where deep water was. Me swim and wade long ways in dark, go this way and that; think me never see light. At night me come out far down the creek. Run far off from bad school and Captain Cameron."

"And then what? How in the world did you manage to get away out here—thousands of miles—without being captured?"

"Too long a story to tell, Linn. Me get other clothes at farm-house. Me light-colored—like negro man. Walk some, ride some on freight cars. Hide in woods and mountains, beg food to eat. At last me reach Missouri River, and soon find my people."

"How long ago was that? Before the outbreak?"

"Just when my father take the warpath with Gray Fox," Deerfoot explained. "Me go with them. Help to kill and scalp a heap. Me young chief now—hate all white men but you."

"I'm sorry to hear you talk that way," said Linn, perceiving that Deerfoot was more of a savage than ever, and that he burned to revenge his fancied ill-treatment

at the Indian school. "I wish you had come a little sooner. Then Flying Thunder might have refused to join Gray Fox, and there would have been no outbreak."

"Flying Thunder glad to go on the warpath," muttered Deerfoot. "Nearly all the Sioux out now. They stay out through winter—kill heap soldiers. No go back to reservation. Mebe find new hunting-grounds over the Canada border in the spring."

"I hardly think you will," Linn imprudently said. "The troops are sure to get the upper hand long before the winter ends. Your people may be outwitting them now _____"

"No talk that way," Deerfoot interrupted, sharply, and with a frown, "You tell me why you wear soldier clothes, Linn—why you come away from Carlisle."

"I came away because I quarreled with my father," Linn answered. "He disowned me and drove me from home. But he was unjust and in the wrong, though he did not know that. So then I enlisted in the army. I had always wanted to be a soldier, and this outbreak gave me a lift up the ladder of promotion. I was made a corporal not long ago."

He went on to speak of his life at Fort Sandiman, and of his recent adventures, touching briefly on the fight up the gorge, and the escape from the ledge of himself and Private Reily.

"Me sorry to hear this," said Deerfoot, who had listened to the narrative in grim silence. "That why my people want to burn you at the stake—because the other man with you get away to bring soldiers."

"Then Reily escaped, did he?" inquired Linn, forcing himself to speak without any trace of the joy that was in his heart. "And he brought the relief force? Tell me what happened, Deerfoot. Was there a fight?"

"Much big fight," Deerfoot answered sullenly. "Heaps

of soldiers come—shoot and shoot—beat the Sioux off. Lots of my people killed, and lots of soldiers.”

“And the soldiers up in the valley on the ledge—were they rescued?” Linn demanded.

Deerfoot shook his head.

“All killed,” he muttered. “Some of Gray Fox’s braves climb up rocks before daylight—before soldiers come to help. Me not there then, but next day me see the scalps. So many.”

He held up five fingers and a thumb.

“All six of them dead,” Linn exclaimed, hoarsely. “My poor, brave comrades.”

He did not doubt the story, and for a moment or two he could not speak. He felt a burning rage and thirst for vengeance as he pictured the death struggle at the base of the cliff, and tears of pity forced themselves into his eyes.

“What has happened during the past week?” he asked, finally. “Where are the soldiers now?”

“Everywhere,” replied Deerfoot. “They hunt and hunt, and can’t find Indians. Sioux too cunning for them. They hide here and there in scattered bands. Mebbe come together soon.”

“And where have you been while I was a prisoner?”

“Me out on war-path with braves,” was the proud response. “Me kill and scalp like big chief. Me take prisoner——”

Deerfoot paused abruptly, and came a step nearer.

“Linn, you no tell me all,” he said, in a crafty tone. “Why your father drive you from home? Did you steal that money?”

“Do you think I’m a thief?” Linn cried, indignantly. “You know me better than that. I wouldn’t have suspected you of such a thing. Do you believe I stole that money? Tell me.”

Deerfoot returned neither denial nor assent, and Linn, eager to clear himself in the eyes of the young Indian, plunged precipitately into a confession that he was destined to regret bitterly when it was too late.

"Did you never suspect the truth, Deerfoot?" he exclaimed. "Did you think Bruce Cameron had forgiven you for beating him in the wrestling match that day? He and Steve Halsey planned to steal the captain's money, and fasten the crime on you. That was why they helped you to escape, and they gave you part of the money so that if you were caught the evidence of your guilt would be plain.

"But I got mixed up in the scheme myself, and had to suffer with you. I was in Captain Cameron's room that afternoon, and saw where he put the money. And in the evening, when I followed Bruce and Steve into the grounds, and overheard part of the plot, I was captured by the guard. The captain let me go, and when the story came out the next day I saw through the whole thing. I started off to hunt Bruce and Steve, intending to make them confess and clear you. I found them at the creek, and you know what happened then. Steve hid some of the money in my pocket, and between the two they made out that you and I together had committed the robbery, and that it was I who planned your escape. They stuck to the lie, and I couldn't prove my innocence. My father believed me to be a thief, and he—he told me never to darken his door again——"

Linn stopped, overcome by the memory of the wrongs he had suffered. Deerfoot watched him for a moment with an impassive face, and then said, quietly:

"Me never think you a thief, Linn. Me believe this story true. You say Bruce put this crime on me and you? He make me near lose my life in cave. He make it

so Carlisle people think you stole the money, and your father drive you from home?"

"Yes, that's just it," replied Linn. "Do you understand?"

"Not quite, Linn—mebbe almost. You tell it all again."

So Linn went over the narrative a second time, relating in detail what had happened on that fatal night, and the subsequent day, making it as plain and simple as he could.

"Me understand now," muttered Deerfoot, and as he spoke his face was stern with wrath, and there was a flashing fire in his black eyes. "Me good friend to you, Linn," he added. "You took my part one day long ago—when Bruce say I wrestled him foul. Me no forget that. Me save your life just now, and me do more. You wait here. Me come back soon."

With this the young Indian crept through the doorway of the lodge, and vanished. Linn sat down at the rear end and waited, puzzling himself to account for the strange words of his friend, and puzzling in vain. Not a glimmer of the strange and amazing truth entered his head.

Fully five minutes passed, and then the flaps were thrown back as Deerfoot entered the lodge. Behind him came two braves dragging between them a white captive—a quaking, pale-faced lad, with disheveled hair, scared and tearful eyes, and arms bound together at the wrists. And that wretched captive was Bruce Cameron.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VAIN PLEADING.

"Linn!"

"Bruce!"

That was all they could say in the first moment of astonishment. The lad who had been so deeply wronged, and the recreant friend who had wronged him, stood gazing at each other with flushed faces, almost doubting the evidence of their own eyes. Deerfoot watched them with a grim and evil smile, and the two braves squatted indifferently against the door of the lodge.

"How did you get here, Linn?" Bruce asked, hoarsely. "No one knew what had become of you—ah, you are in uniform. I understand it all now. You enlisted in the army and were sent West. And it was my fault—my base cowardice and lies that drove you to it."

"Yes, I enlisted," said Linn, quietly. "That accounts for my presence here. But you, Bruce? I thought you were still at Carlisle!"

"No, we left there at the end of July. Father was ordered to Fort Fremont, in Western Montana. And a week ago he started with three troops of cavalry to join the field column under Major Dallas. I persuaded him to take me with him, and this is the result. Day before yesterday I was out with a scouting party, and a lot of Indians led by Deerfoot surrounded us. He recognized me and spared my life, but all the soldiers were killed and scalped. I was brought here this morning, and I suppose my father believes me dead."

"Linn, won't you forgive me?" Bruce went on imploringly. "I can never undo what I have done, but I have suffered terribly from remorse and sorrow. I was a dastard and a coward to fasten the crime on you, but it was more Steve Halsey than me. I was under his influence, and I was afraid of his threats. It is not too late to clear you, I hope. If ever I get the chance I will make a full confession. For the sake of our old friendship say you forgive me, Linn. Won't you?"

"You are asking a great deal," replied Linn. "I am afraid you don't realize the injury you have done me——"

"Yes, I do," cried Bruce. "I branded you as a thief, drove you from home, ruined you. I have not had an hour's peace since then. I have thought of my sins night and day. I know it is asking too much of you to forgive me, but if you won't do that, at least use your influence to help me—to save my life. It is in danger, Linn. When I was captured Deerfoot assured me I would merely be kept a prisoner until the trouble was over. But a little while ago he came to me in a terrible rage, and declared that he was going to have me burned at the stake. He accused me of plotting revenge against him, and of fastening the theft of the money on you and him. He knows all, but he did not know it before. You must have told him, Linn."

"And so I did, God help me," cried Linn.

He covered his face with his hands, and a hoarse sob burst from his white lips. Like a flash he realized his mistake, and saw the dreadful consequences of his impulsive words. He understood the plan of revenge—both for himself and Deerfoot—that was working in the latter's savage mind.

"I forgive you, Bruce," he said, "even as I must ask you to forgive me. But what I have done was unintentional and without a spark of malice. I confessed all to

Deerfoot because I saw that he believed me to be a thief. I did not dream that you were in his power—that you were anywhere nearer than Carlisle. Had I known the truth, I would have kept silence at any cost.”

“I am sure of that,” replied Bruce. “It is not in you to do anything mean. And you will try to save me, Linn, won’t you?”

“As far as lies in my power I will,” promised Linn. “You shan’t be put to death if I can help it. Possibly this threat is only intended to scare you a little and punish you for——”

“No scare him,” interrupted Deerfoot, whose face had grown dark and sullen during the above conversation. “You no talk this way, Linn, else we not be friends. Bruce make lies and wrong me—wrong you, too. He must die, so you and me be revenged.”

“But I have forgiven him, Deerfoot,” Linn interceded, hoarsely, “and if I, who am the most deeply injured, can forgive him, surely you can. You lived with the white men long enough to learn how they treat their enemies. It is nobler to pardon than to take revenge. Keep Bruce a prisoner, if you will, but don’t be so wicked and cruel as to put him to death.”

“He must die,” the Indian muttered, doggedly. “Me think you like to see him tortured, Linn. But you have weak squaw-heart, like all pale-faces. No more talk about it now. My mind made up—must have revenge.”

“Don’t say that,” cried Bruce, as he burst into cowardly tears, and sank limply down at the Indian’s feet. “Spare my life, Deerfoot—I am sorry I wronged you—I will do anything for you—I will be your friend as long as I live. Only don’t kill me—think how you would feel in my place, and be merciful——”

Deerfoot spurned the weeping and abject lad with his foot, and made a swift sign to the two braves. They

instantly laid hold of the captive, and began to drag him from the lodge.

"Linn! Linn! save me!" shrieked Bruce. "Don't let them take me away. I will never see you again—I will be tortured to death——"

"Don't despair," cried Linn. "I will do all I can for you."

He stepped forward as though to interfere, but Deerfoot gave him a shove that threw him violently on his back. By the time he was on his feet again the Indians and their prisoner had left the lodge, and Bruce's pitiful cries were growing faint in the distance.

With a pallid face, and with limbs that trembled from the unnerving ordeal he had passed through, Linn turned to Deerfoot. By an effort he kept down his rising passion, and pleaded long and earnestly for Bruce's life, using all the arguments he could think of. Finding that his eloquence was of no avail, he lost his temper and prudence, and made rash threats of speedy and terrible vengeance by the soldiers.

But pleading and threats alike were wasted on Deerfoot's dogged and savage nature. He listened in proud silence, and with a grim set of the lips and a flash of the eye that betokened an immovable resolution.

"Enough," he said, finally, with a wave of the hand. "You talk no more, Linn. May as well go out and talk to river down yonder. Mebbe river listen, but not Deerfoot. Me think you have brave heart like Indian. Me think you want revenge—like to see Bruce tortured. Me give you that chance because you good friend to me once. Now me know you have heart like squaw. We not the same friends any more, but me not put you to death like Bruce."

"If you won't save Bruce, you must kill me, too,"

said Linn. "I brought this on him by my own folly, and I will share his fate."

"Not so, Linn. Me still like you a little, though you have squaw heart. Me remember what good friend you were at Carlisle——"

"If you remember that, then be a good friend to me now," interrupted Linn. "For my sake—for the sake of our past friendship—spare Bruce's life. To burn him at the stake will be a horrible revenge. To keep him a prisoner will be punishment enough for the wrong he did you—more than enough. Forgive him, Deerfoot——"

"No," hissed the Indian, his eyes gleaming like living coals. "He must die at the stake. I have spoken. My father, Flying Thunder, has spoken. It must be. You say no more, Linn, else I wear your scalp at my belt."

As he spoke he whipped out a long-bladed knife, and repeatedly stabbed the air. His voice was husky and low with rage, and on his dusky features could be read the barbaric and blood-thirsty instinct of generations of lawless and untamed Sioux. For a moment Linn actually trembled for his life, and prepared for self-defense. He said nothing, for the reason that he knew further appeal to be absolutely useless.

Presently Deerfoot sheathed the knife, and in a slightly less passionate tone, he said:

"Now that settled, Linn. Me tell you what do with you. Me make a big discovery when out on war-path. Me find whole army of soldiers in camp where can easily be trapped. They tired and worn out—no leave camp for two days, mebbe. Me send word to Gray Fox, then come back to tell Flying Thunder. Soon all the Sioux warriors go surround soldiers—cut them to pieces."

Linn gave a slight start.

"This must be true," he reflected. "It is likely that

Captain Cameron and his party have joined Major Dallas, and the column is resting in camp after the tiresome fighting and marching of the past week. If the Indians really have them in a trap, and can surround them, it will be the Custer affair over again. Oh, if I could only escape to warn them ! But I don't see any chance——”

He looked into Deerfoot's face, and asked, carelessly :

“Where are the soldiers? Near here?”

“Ten miles that way,” replied the Indian, pointing due south. “They encamped in hollow—stream on one side, and mountain on the other. When midnight comes my people burn Bruce at stake, then march to fight soldiers. Gray Fox come from other direction at same time. In early morning we fall on soldiers—cut them to pieces.”

After a pause, Deerfoot added :

“We leave you here with old men and squaws, Linn. By and by we come back. Then we adopt you in my tribe—make you Indian like me. If you no do that, we keep you prisoner all time.”

“All right, Deerfoot,” replied Linn. “I'll think it over and give you an answer when you come back. It's no use to talk any more about Bruce, so we'll let the matter drop. I have the satisfaction of knowing that I did all I could for him.— But I want you to grant me one favor. When a white man is going to die, his friends like to bid him farewell alone. Will you let me see Bruce for a few minutes this evening to bid him good-by. I have paper and pencil with me, and perhaps he will write a confession that he stole the money. If he does, I will send it home to Carlisle, and then my friends will know I am not a thief.”

Linn waited with ill-concealed anxiety for the answer, for on that hung the success or failure of a plan that had flashed into his fertile mind—a plan of heroic generosity

and of a daring and boldness that was almost inconceivable.

"Yes, me take you to see Bruce," Deerfoot replied, unsuspiciously, after a short pause. "Me wait outside lodge while you give him farewell and let him make confession. You go with me now, Linn?"

"No, not now. I don't want to see him so soon after what happened here. I would rather give him time to realize his fate, and prepare for it. And I need rest and sleep badly. Better come back at sunset, Deerfoot, I will go with you then."

"All right, Linn," was the ready response. "By time sun go down my people not be so angry at you—not get mad and want to kill you when they see you go by. Me come then."

With this Deerfoot stalked out of the lodge, and Linn heard him giving guttural instructions to the braves who were on guard duty.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW LINN REPAID HIS WRONGS.

Linn had spoken the truth when he told Deerfoot that he needed rest and slumber badly, for he had slept but little the previous night, and the recent ordeal at the stake—when a terrible death confronted him—had been a severe shock to his nervous system. But he had another motive in postponing the interview until after sunset—namely, to gain time—and so far it had succeeded.

However, the thought of Bruce's impending fate, and the daring plan he had vowed to do his best to carry out kept him awake for a large part of the day. Hour after hour found him crouched on the floor of the lodge, his face haggard, his mind tormented with doubts that were only too well founded.

It was long past noon when drowsiness finally overpowered him, and he rolled over on his side in a state of merciful unconsciousness. It was not a restful sleep, for hideous dreams tormented him constantly. From one of these he suddenly awakened, bathed in perspiration, to realize vaguely that Deerfoot was standing over him.

"Me here, Linn. Me take you now to see Bruce."

"All right," muttered Linn, stupidly, huddling himself together as though for another sleep. But for all that he was now wide awake, and he had seen at a quick glance, through the partly open door-way, that a glimmer of daylight was still disputing possession with the falling shades of evening. At all hazards he must gain a little more time, and so he craftily closed his eyes and pretended to sleep.

"Linn, me here," repeated Deerfoot. "Come, get up."

Receiving no answer, the Indian stood in silence over the motionless lad. Perhaps he pitied his apparent weariness, and for that reason did not waken him at once. In unchanging attitude he waited fully ten minutes, and then, stooping down, he tugged at Linn's arm.

"Hullo—who's that?" exclaimed Linn, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "Oh, it's you, Deerfoot. Ready, are you?"

"You sleep sound, Linn. Me call you twice."

"Did you?" replied Linn. "That's too bad. I was sleeping like a rock." He rose to his feet, yawned, and glanced into the now dark night. "If you don't mind I'll wrap this blanket around me," he added. "The air feels mighty cool."

"Put blanket on," assented Deerfoot. "Heap cold outside."

Linn quickly muffled the warm folds of the blanket around his head and shoulders, and followed Deerfoot from the lodge. They passed silently by the guards at the entrance, and strode side by side among the surrounding groups of teepees. Down the hill a couple of fires were burning, and the restless stirring of the hobbled ponies was borne faintly upward on the breeze. Here and there a solitary brave loomed out of the darkness, but, in all, scarcely a dozen were up and stirring.

"The rascals are sound asleep in the lodges," Linn reflected, with much satisfaction, "resting themselves for the march at midnight, and dreaming of the fun they are going to have in torturing Bruce. It won't be my fault if they don't get badly fooled. So far the scheme promises well, but the worst is to come."

A moment later Deerfoot paused by a small teepee of skins that stood near the outer verge of the camp, and was guarded by only two braves, who squatted before the

entrance; a rifle lay beside each. Linn noted hastily that the spot was at no great distance from where the river left the valley at its southern extremity.

"Bruce in there," said Deerfoot. "Soon be time to put him to death. You want to speak with him alone?"

"Yes, I would rather, if you don't mind. If you go in, too, there will likely be another scene."

"All right. You go alone, Linn. Me wait here three, five minutes. You want light to help him write confession?"

"No; I've given that up," said Linn. "It would be cruel to ask the poor fellow to write, and I doubt if he could do it, anyhow. I'll just bid him farewell, and tell him to die bravely. I won't be long."

Deerfoot nodded as he propped his back against a convenient rock. The warriors before the teepees moved to opposite sides, and with a fast-beating heart Linn entered. All was dark at first, but in an instant he made out the figure of the captive lying on the ground at his feet.

"Are you awake, Bruce?" he whispered. "Don't make any noise——"

"Oh, is it you, Linn?" came the eager and husky reply. "Are you going to save me?"

"I'm going to do my best, Bruce. Are you bound?"

"Yes; hands and feet. I can't stir."

Linn knelt down, and with nimble fingers he set to work at the knots. He soon had the strips of raw-hide loose, and after helping Bruce to rise he took the blanket from his own body, and muffled his friend's head and shoulders in the thick folds.

"What are you going to do, Linn?" the latter asked.

"I'll tell you in a minute. Are you limber enough to run for your life?"

"Yes, if I've got to do it."

"Well, you must," Linn whispered. "It's your only chance. Listen sharp now, and don't miss a word. Walk outside as coolly as though you were me—which Deerfoot will think you are—and keep the blanket close. Deerfoot is waiting, and he will start with you toward the lodge where we were this morning. If he asks any questions answer in a low voice. When you have gone about fifty feet trip him over—if you can—and run for life. Strike for the south end of the valley, and if you reach the narrowest part in safety, take to the river. Swim across, or down with the current, and get into the thick woods on the opposite bank. Then head straight——"

"And what are you——"

"Hush!" Linn whispered. "I'm not through. Head straight south, and ten miles off you will find the soldiers in camp between a stream and a mountain. Tell Major Dallas they are to be surrounded and attacked at day-break. The Sioux are coming in force, Flying Thunder from one direction, and Gray Fox from the other. Don't get captured if you can help it, and look out for Indians on the way. The country will likely be full of them. Now go. Do you understand it all?"

Bruce fiercely caught hold of Linn's hands.

"Yes, I understand," he whispered. "I understand that you are sacrificing yourself for me, and after the cruel wrong I have done you. I don't deserve this, Linn. I refuse to accept——"

"But you must, Bruce. The soldiers must be warned of their peril, and if I take this chance you will die at the stake. If you get away I may be able to escape, too. Deerfoot will be terribly angry, but I don't think he will kill me in case I am found here in your place. And now go. If he becomes suspicious, and enters, all is lost. Not a moment dare be wasted."

"I am going now," Bruce whispered, in a voice that

was broken by a sob. "In just one second. Linn, I shall never, never forget this. You are the best and noblest fellow that ever lived. If I come through all right I will confess everything and clear your name. If you escape, too, and I hope you will, we will be fast friends for life."

"Go! go!" entreated Linn, "for your sake—for the sake of the soldiers."

"Yes, right away. Good-by, old fellow—dear old friend, if I may still call you that."

With a last clasp of the hand Bruce strode calmly and uprightly from the teepee, the blanket muffling his head and shoulders, and the flapping skins swung shut behind him. Linn crouched down in the darkness and waited—waited in trembling apprehension, fearing more for Bruce than for himself, and recking little of his own fate if only his friend should escape.

A few seconds slipped by in silence, and lengthened to a minute. Then a shrill and angry whoop stabbed the night air, followed by another and another. Instantly all was commotion, and yelling, and calling of guttural voices, and neighing and stamping of ponies, and speeding of moccasined feet over the beaten grass.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TRAGEDY AT THE RIVER.

At this critical moment Linn was too excited to remain longer in his crouching position. He leaped to his feet and crept softly to the door of the teepee. There he stood impatiently, quivering with dread and suspense, listening to the growing outcry, and trying vainly to see through the tightly-drawn skins.

"So far all has turned out as I hoped," he reflected. "Bruce and I are of the same build, and in the darkness he readily passed for me. I suppose no questions were asked, or his voice might have betrayed him. He found a chance to trip Deerfoot over, and now he is running for his life. Perhaps Deerfoot has not yet discovered the trick, and thinks I am the fugitive. Oh, I hope Bruce will escape—I hope he will get clear away to warn the soldiers."

Up to this time Linn had given but little thought to himself. He had remotely entertained the idea of escaping, though seeing little chance of accomplishing it. The teepee was guarded, he had reasoned, and an attempt to break out would likely result in his death. The wisest and safest course would be to stay quietly where he was, face Deerfoot's wrath, and endeavor to appease him.

But now something happened that altered the situation, and opened an unforeseen opportunity to the lad. He heard a quick movement close outside, a hasty exchange of guttural speech, and then a couple of retreating footsteps. And he knew instantly what it meant.

"One of the two Indians on guard has gone off to

join the pursuit," he muttered, half aloud, "and the other fellow won't be paying much attention to the teepee, since he thinks his prisoner is bound hand and foot. Here's a great chance of escape! If I can get away from the camp without being seen I'll defy the Indians to catch me. I'll make a detour to join the soldiers, and come in about the same time that Bruce does—if he succeeds in giving his pursuers the slip. But I must act right off. If Bruce's identity is discovered there will be a rush in this direction to secure me."

With Linn to think was to act, and he had formed the above resolution very speedily. Less than a minute had now elapsed from the time the outcry began, and the opportunity was a promising one. At once he dropped to his hands and knees, and began to examine the edges of the teepee. He was met by a check and a disappointment. The covering of skins was staked tightly to the ground on all sides.

"If I had a knife I would be all right," he reflected. "But I haven't, and the only thing I can do is to make a break for it. I'm sure to make a noise if I try to force my way out behind, and then the game will be up. Here goes for good luck or bad."

He turned around, and with a deliberate movement drew apart the entrance flaps of the teepee and thrust his head and shoulders outside. Yes, only one Indian was there, squatted with his back to the doorway. He was looking in the direction of the tumult and bustle that pervaded the camp, and his rifle lay beside him.

The lad followed his head and shoulders with one foot, and was about to plant the other outside the teepee when a rustle of the skins betrayed him. The brave glanced quickly behind, to see Linn standing over him, and both made a desperate grab for the rifle.

Linn caught it by the stock just as the Indian's hands

fastened on the slippery barrel. The latter was still sitting on his haunches, and the struggle toppled him over and made him lose his grip. Before he could rise, or even utter a single cry, the weapon's heavy butt crashed on his head with the full force of the lad's two muscular arms.

That settled the fight. Silently, and with quivering limbs, the Sioux's body settled back in the grass. Linn crouched low for an instant, while he looked warily on all sides. Evidently none had witnessed the affair. At a distance, among the lodges, screaming squaws and children were running to and fro in confusion, and angry warriors were flashing by in the darkness. The pursuit had trailed away down the slope in the direction of the river, and from the whooping and yelling it was apparent that Bruce was giving his pursuers a stern chase.

Having satisfied himself that the coast was clear, Linn took possession of the Sioux's rifle and cartridges, and crept to the rear end of the teepee. He prudently crawled twenty feet farther on hands and knees, and then, rising to his feet, he ran due southward across the sloping bed of the valley, keeping parallel with the river, but at a considerable distance from it.

The tumult to his left and in the rear spurred him to desperate speed, and without detection he reached the steep and timbered hill that bounded the sequestered hiding-place of Flying Thunder's band. Here he hesitated only an instant, knowing that to attempt to scale the height would be the least prudent course. The alternative threatened danger, but it also offered a speedy outlet to the open country, and the saving of valuable time.

So Linn turned to the left, and under cover of the bushes at the base of the hill he rapidly approached the narrow mouth of the valley. He partly rounded the jutting spur of rocks and timber, trembling to hear the fren-

zied yells that were now ringing on the night air close by him, and finally he paused alongside of a boulder that stood, amid dense scrub, within six feet of the swiftly flowing stream.

By rapid running, and by steering a fairly straight course, Linn had actually got ahead of the pursuit—a fact which he discovered the moment he peered around the edge of the rock. What he saw made his heart throb and his eyes dilate.

Bruce must have tried doubling and twisting at first to throw his pursuers off the track, instead of making a bee-line for the mouth of the valley. He had partly succeeded in this, and had gained enough of a start to enable him to take to the river at some distance below the Indian camp. Now he was in mid-stream, swimming lustily and diagonally for the opposite bank, and his bobbing head and splashing arms were what Linn saw from the bushy nook behind the boulder.

The fugitive was still some fifty feet above Linn's hiding-place, and the pursuing horde of Indians, led by Deerfoot, were half that distance in the rear. They were tearing along the bank, whooping and yelling, but not firing a single shot. This meant beyond a doubt that Deerfoot still believes the escaped prisoner to be Linn, and wanted to take him alive.

By this time a silvery moon was peeping over the hill-tops that hemmed in the valley, though a mass of clouds completely covered it. But suddenly the clouds rolled away, and as the flood of light poured down on the river, Deerfoot and his companions uttered yell after yell of rage. They had discovered the identity of the fugitive.

Linn riveted his eyes on the scene, trembling with fear for his friend, and knowing that he was powerless to help him. The tragic scene that followed the recognition passed quickly. The Indians made a spurt along the

grassy shore that brought them parallel with the swimmer, who was now within six feet of the opposite bank, and almost directly across from Linn. Then half a dozen rifles flashed and cracked, and Bruce vanished under the foaming current.

Linn gritted his teeth with impotent rage as he watched vainly for the lad to reappear. But he did not come up again. Evidently the bullets had done their deadly work, and the current was rolling Bruce's body over the pebbly bottom of the stream.

With triumphant cries the Indians gathered on the bank for a moment, gazing at the spot where their victim had disappeared. Then two braves plunged into the water and struck out for the further shore. An instant later, in obedience to an imperative summons from Deerfoot, the rest of the band turned back up the slope, and sped away in the direction of the camp.

"I know what that means," muttered Linn. "They want to settle scores with me now, and when they find that I have escaped they will be after me full cry. I dare not stay here a second, and I couldn't do any good if I did stay. Poor Bruce is dead—there's no doubt about that. Well, I did my best to save him, and if I ever get the chance I'll settle scores with his murderers. And now to warn the soldiers. There are ten miles of hostile country between me and Major Dallas' column, and a detour will add three or four more to it. I've got a hard task ahead of me, and one that requires both cunning and speed."

On hands and knees Linn crept forward through the bushes until he was twenty yards below the two Indians who were searching zealously along the opposite bank of the river for Bruce's body. Then, being now clear of the valley's mouth, he rose to his feet and settled into a brisk trot, heading southwestward over the open country.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SAFE IN CAMP.

The spot where the field column was encamped had been selected by Major Dallas more on account of its advantages in the way of forage and water, than because of its utility for defense. It was a semi-circular strip of level soil, covered with rich and luxuriant grass that afforded the best of browsing for the horses. In the background—toward the south—rose a tall, rocky mountain, a single and detached spur, and the only one in the neighborhood. In front, forming a loop in its erratic course, flowed a shallow stream of swift and sparkling water. To right and left, and straight ahead toward the north, stretched the undulating and sage-covered plains.

Here the troops had been lying for three days, resting after the hot conflict with the Sioux, and the bootless marching and scouting, and waiting in vain for intelligence that would bring them once more face to face with a large body of the enemy. An attack was not dreamed of, for it was generally believed that the Indians were still scattered far and wide, craftily hiding in inaccessible nooks and strongholds, and watching for a chance to fall upon scouting detachments.

At two o'clock on the morning of the fourth day peace and quiet brooded over the sleeping camp, and the silvery moon peeped down at intervals from the fleecy masses of clouds that were blowing over the sky.

The space between the mountain and the river was dotted with a few white tents, and with the motionless

forms of the troopers slumbering beside the faintly-glowing fires. In the rear the horses were picketed, close to several supply wagons which had safely made their way to the column through a hostile country. Here also stood the hospital tent, containing a dozen patients who were convalescing from wounds received in the recent fight. Along the banks of the river, and to right and left of the camp, paced the watchful sentries.

In his tent near the middle of the camp sat Major Dallas, frequently rubbing his drowsy eyes as he wrote dispatches by the feeble light of a swinging lamp. At a quarter past two, just as he was ready to put aside pen and paper, he heard a challenge from a distant sentry ring clearly on the still air. A faint response followed, and then came a call for the officer of the night.

"I wonder what that means," muttered the major, as he instinctively rose to his feet and reached for his cap and pistols.

The question was answered a minute later. Footsteps approached the tent, and the glow of the lamp revealed two figures outside the door.

"Major, here is Corporal Osborne, just arrived," exclaimed the voice of Lieutenant Blair, the officer on duty.

"Yes, I'm here, Major Dallas," said Linn, as he staggered wearily into the tent, hatless, exhausted, and covered with dirt and briars. He dropped his heavy rifle in the corner, and sank down on a camp-stool.

Lieutenant Blair saluted and turned away, and for half a minute the major stared in speechless astonishment at the bedraggled figure of his visitor. Then he hastily poured a small glass of liquor from a bottle and put it to Linn's lips.

"Drink that, Osborne," he said. "Don't hesitate—you need it badly. So it's really you, alive and well! Why, man, we had given you up for dead. You are officially

reported missing. Where have you been, and how did you get here to-night?"

"I'll tell you in a minute, sir," replied Linn, as he drained the glass and handed it back. "I feel much better now—that went to the right spot. And now for my story, which I must tell briefly and rapidly. There's no time to lose."

He took a long breath, and then plunged into his narrative. In a few words he sketched the fight and siege of a week past up in the narrow gorge, and the departure of Private Reily. He described more at length his capture, and his captivity in Flying Thunder's camp, the plan of attack Deerfoot had communicated to him, the escape and death of Bruce Cameron, and his own fortunate escape.

"So you see there's no time to be wasted, major," he concluded. "I was terribly afraid I would come too late to save the camp, or that I would miss the way. And then the chances were against my getting through safely. I traveled as fast as I could, but I had to be constantly on the watch, and it was necessary to make a great many detours. The country to the north is full of Sioux, who are waiting to join Flying Thunder as he comes this way. He intended to attack you at daybreak, but now that I have escaped to give you warning, he will push on with his braves at full speed. They may be close at hand now. And there are Gray Fox and his warriors off in the other direction, ready and waiting to attack from the south."

"There is time enough," replied the major, who had already decided on a plan of action. "I see my way pretty clearly, and am not afraid of the result. But if I succeed in striking a blow that ends the campaign the credit will be mainly yours. I don't know how to thank you, Osborne. Your courage and pluck have prevented what might have been a repetition of the Custer disaster. You

have shown wonderful ability through all your adventures, and if ever a man deserved promotion it is yourself. I am personally glad that you have turned up alive, and I assure you I shall not forget this night's work."

"I merely tried to do my duty, sir," said Linn, flushing with pride and pleasure.

"I wish there were more of your stamp in the army," replied the major. "That trick by which you got young Cameron away was splendid, and you did it at the risk of your own life. Poor fellow! it is a pity the sacrifice was in vain. The blow will not fall so heavily on Captain Cameron as it would have under other circumstances. He gave his son up for dead long ago, and the loss has made him a changed man. When you see him——"

"Is Captain Cameron in camp now, sir?" interrupted Linn, anxiously.

"No, he is off somewhere to the south with a considerable force, and your own command, Troop A, is with the party. It is likely they will fall in with Gray Fox, and prevent him joining in this threatened attack. If so, I will find it a comparatively easy matter to handle Flying Thunder and his braves. I have nine troops here, and men and horses are fresh and in perfect condition."

"May I ask you a few questions, Major?" said Linn, who was greatly relieved to hear that there was no immediate prospect of an interview with Captain Cameron. "I am ignorant of all that has happened since my capture. I only know that Reily reached you safely, and that there was a fight at the mouth of the gorge in the early morning. Is it true that the poor fellows on the ledge were massacred?"

"Every man of them," the major answered, sadly, "in spite of the gallant defense they made under your command, and subsequently. We got up there too late to

save them, and found only their mutilated bodies. The place must have been rushed just before daylight."

"Then Deerfoot spoke the truth," Linn said, hoarsely. "All those brave fellows killed! It is terrible! And did you lose many men in the fight?"

"It was a hot scrimmage for a while," replied the major, "but I had the whole column with me, and in the end the Sioux were beaten and dispersed with considerable loss of life. Our loss was thirteen killed and a number wounded. Troop A bore the brunt of the fight, and suffered the most. Private Reily was killed, and Lieutenant Dimsdale is among the number of missing——"

"Poor Reily killed!" exclaimed Linn. "And Lieutenant Dimsdale is missing. That means he is dead, of course. I am awfully sorry to hear it. He was a warm friend of mine, and I counted on him to see me through——"

He stopped abruptly, somewhat to the major's surprise.

"What do you mean, Osborne?" the latter asked.

"I mean that I fear I will be blamed for the loss of the detachment under my command," Linn answered, boldly. "Am I right, Major Dallas? Has not Captain Norman intimated something to that effect?"

"To be frank with you, he has," replied the major. "But I would rather not speak about the matter at present. Norman may change his mind about making rash charges against you. It is my personal opinion, from what little I know, that you are not in the least responsible. It was a foolhardy order, your being sent off there to scout with a handful of men. Come what may, Osborne, you will find a friend in me."

"Thank you," said Linn. "I feel sure now that I will be vindicated. I did the best I could, and obeyed orders as far as possible. It is unfortunate, though, that the rest of the party are all dead."

"Others of Troop A heard your orders," replied the major, "and can speak for you. By the way, Osborne, this is a remarkable thing about Deerfoot. Now that he is alive and with his father, Flying Thunder has no excuse for carrying on the war. You say the young fellow escaped from the cavern, and made his way back to Dakota."

"That is the story he tells, sir, and I have no doubt it is correct."

"And you were an old friend of his, and also a friend of Bruce Cameron's?"

"Yes, major."

"Then Carlisle was your home before you enlisted?"

"It was, sir," Linn answered, in a low tone.

There was a brief pause. The major seemed to be thinking hard as he watched the lad. Linn saw trouble and recognition in store for him in the future, when he should be brought face to face with Captain Cameron, and for a moment he was tempted to confess all to his commanding officer and ask for his aid. But before he could make up his mind the major said sharply:

"It is time to prepare for action, and the minutes are precious. Lie down here in my tent, Osborne, and try to get some sleep. You need it badly. I am going to give Flying Thunder and his band a little surprise."

"I want to take part in the fight, sir," replied Linn. "A very little sleep will do for me."

"Still thirsting for danger, eh?" the major answered, grimly. "Very well, Osborne, I will waken you before we start, and assign you to a troop. But see that you sleep in the meantime."

With this Major Dallas hurried from the tent, and a moment or two later there was a stir and bustle throughout the camp. But Linn heard nothing of it. His troubles were already forgotten in deep slumber.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FIGHT AT DAYBREAK.

It wanted a quarter to three o'clock when the interview between Linn and Major Dallas ended. The latter hastily summoned his officers, and communicated to them what he had heard. A brief discussion followed, and all quickly agreed on what seemed to them the best measures to be taken.

"We can do no better, gentlemen, at such short notice," said the major. "I am inclined to think, however, that the opportunity is a promising one, and that it may end the campaign. It is understood, then, that we shall advance northward to meet Flying Thunder's band, and try to fall upon them unawares. One troop will remain to guard the camp, and if attacked by Gray Fox—which I regard as unlikely—they can hold out until our return. And now lose no time in carrying out your orders. We must start in twenty minutes, if possible."

Instructions were obeyed with as much alacrity and precaution as Major Dallas could have desired. In five minutes every trooper was on his feet, eager to march against the enemy. Rapidly, but with silence, the horses were unstaked and saddled, arms and equipments were inspected, and cartridges were distributed in large quantities. The embers of the fires were extinguished, and mounted patrols were sent out north and south.

While these preparations were going on the camp was put in shape for defense. A small square was marked out, having for its rear side the precipitous base of the

mountain. Earthworks were rapidly thrown up on the remaining three sides, and within the inclosure were placed the supply wagons, the hospital tent, and the troop which the major had detailed to stay behind.

All was in readiness by twenty minutes past three. An orderly was sent to waken Linn, and the young corporal hurried from the tent, looking as fresh as though he had slept for twenty-four hours, instead of a few minutes. He was given a mount, and assigned to duty with Troop D.

Several minutes later the order to march rang sharply on the night air. Without note of bugle, and with no more noise than the muffled trampling of hoofs on the soft grass, troop after troop rode out of the camp, forded the shallow bed of the river, and trotted briskly over the plain to the north. The patrols kept some distance in front, and for half an hour the column advanced without detecting any signs of the enemy.

At about four o'clock, when the camp was three miles in the rear, Major Dallas drew up his force in a long line behind a ridge of ground that stretched east and west, and overlooked a wide hollow through which the Sioux were likely to come. The moon was hidden under clouds, and the darkness gave promise of a successful ambushade.

The column had barely taken its stand in this position when the patrols came riding in and announced that they had heard the tramp of many hoofs toward the north. By the major's orders the men at once dismounted, staked the horses, and posted themselves in the low growth of bushes on the very summit of the ridge, from where they could see plainly into the shadowy hollow that lay beyond.

Five minutes passed in silence and suspense. Then the muffled pounding of hoofs was heard, and the noise swelled louder and nearer. Soon a dark mass loomed in

sight, and now the light of the moon, as it peeped from under the clouds, showed the hollow to be filled with Sioux from side to side. As nearly as the major could judge, the number of the enemy amounted to seven or eight hundred.

On they came at a trot, so confident of taking the camp by surprise that they had no spies thrown out in front. They reached the base of the ridge, and began to ascend into the jaws of the deadly and unsuspected ambushade. When they were half-way up, the moon shone full upon them, revealing the shaggy little ponies, the hundreds of dusky, painted faces, and the glittering array of spears and rifles.

"Now let them have it, men," Major Dallas cried, in a ringing voice. "Aim low and carefully. Fire!"

Instantly, from all along the crest of the ridge, scores of rifles flashed and cracked, and a terrible rain of lead was poured down the slope. A second volley followed, and then a third. Screams of rage and agony blended with the cheering of the triumphant soldiers. As the smoke lifted, and the moon's cold glare shone through it the grassy slope was seen to be dotted with squirming forms. Riderless ponies were dashing here and there, and the front ranks of the Sioux, split into wide gaps by the leaden hurricane, had halted in terror and confusion.

Crash! Once more the crest of the ridge vomited flame and smoke. Crash! again the storm of death swept down the slope. With yells of vengeance, and with a straggling fire that did no harm, Flying Thunder and his braves spurred back toward the hollow, foremost and rearmost tangled in a struggling knot.

A final volley was poured from the ridge, and then, amid the hoarse tumult and din, the trumpeter sounded the call to saddle. Rapidly and orderly the men mount-

ed, and as the major yelled "charge!" the long line of blue-coats poured over the crest, and went plunging down the blood-stained slope after the panic-stricken foe.

Every man thirsted for vengeance, and none were more cool-headed than Linn. In the terrible scenes that followed the young corporal took a prominent part. Just beyond the base of the ridge Sioux and soldiers met with a crash. Rifles flashed and roared, and spears and swords struck with clash and ring. Down went Indians and troopers to yield their dying breath under the trampling hoofs of maddened steeds.

Major Dallas was in the very front of the melee, supported by Troop D. Heedless of the bullets that whistled around him, Linn fired right and left until his pistols and carbine were empty. Then, with clubbed weapon, he spurred forward to gain the side of the major, who was confronting a group of Sioux that numbered among them Flying Thunder and his son.

Here there was a short and desperate struggle. Flying Thunder took deliberate aim at the major, and would have shot him through the heart but for Linn. The gallant young corporal knocked up the chief's rifle so that it exploded harmlessly in the air. Then Deerfoot rode at him with a long spear, whooping with rage, but Linn's horse was shot under him just then, and steed and rider fell together.

By the time Linn had struggled to his feet the hand-to-hand conflict was over. The Sioux had broken before the desperate onslaught of the soldiers, and were in full flight down the hollow, closely pursued by the angry troopers.

Linn grabbed at a riderless horse, swung himself into the saddle, and followed after his command. For an hour the pursuit lasted, and when dawn broke the Sioux were widely dispersed over the country to the north, and the

line of retreat was marked by scores of dead bodies. Several hours before noon the column returned to camp, bringing in a number of prisoners, and mourning the loss of nearly forty men and half as many wounded. Neither Flying Thunder nor Deerfoot were among those captured, and as their bodies could not be found among the dead on the field there was no doubt but that the chief and his son had escaped. The camp had not been molested, nor had any trace been seen of Gray Fox and his band.

* * * * *

As Major Dallas had predicted, this blow really ended the campaign. That same evening couriers arrived from Captain Norman, bringing news that his force had attacked and beaten Gray Fox, and killed the chief himself, and that the braves had sued for peace, and were now on the way back to their reservation. The major sent word that Captain Norman should hang onto the rear of the Indians until they had reached the reservation, and thus Linn's meeting with Captain Cameron—who was with Norman's party—was postponed indefinitely.

The next morning envoys came into camp from Flying Thunder, bringing an offer of submission and peace from that chief. Word was sent to him that he and his braves should return to their reservation, and there await further negotiations. Flying Thunder consented to do this, and so the campaign ended. Two days later Major Dallas' column broke camp, and began the return march to Fort Sandiman. It was necessarily prolonged by bad weather and by the transportation of the wounded, but after ten days of weary marching the Missouri was sighted, and the victorious and battle-scarred troopers rode in at the main gate of the fort. It was a stirring scene, for men, women, and children had turned out *en masse* to greet them. There were shouting and cheering, and

clash and blare of band music, and the clear notes of bugles.

The detachment under Captain Norman had arrived five days before, and as Linn rode proudly across the parade-ground he saw the smiling faces of a number of old comrades of Troop A. Near the stables he passed a group of officers close on the left, among whom were Captain Norman and Captain Cameron. The latter gave the young corporal a glance of amazed recognition, and then turned to Captain Norman with an exclamation of surprise. They put their heads together, talking earnestly, and their eyes followed Linn as he rode on.

"It's all up now," the lad reflected, with a bitter pang at his heart. "Captain Cameron recognized me, and I've got to face the music. It's doubly hard, just when I stand in for promotion again. Bruce is dead, and so is Lieutenant Dimsdale—and all the poor fellows who were with me on that fatal scout. Norman and Cameron will both prefer charges against me, and I can't refute either of them. Well, the sooner it is over the better."

Half an hour later the fort had settled down to its normal state of quiet. The horses were in the stables, and the weary men had dispersed to their quarters, there to wash and dress while they awaited the call to mess. The welcome summons came at last, and as Linn left his room he came face to face in the hall with the officer of the guard.

"Corporal Osborne, you are under arrest," the latter said, sternly. "Here is the order, signed by Colonel Bromley. You must come with me to the guard-house."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

The colonel's office was uncomfortably crowded that night, for the whole post was interested in the affair of Corporal Osborne, and as many as possible had gained admittance. Colonel Bromley was seated at his desk, writing leisurely, and occasionally glancing toward the door. To right and left of him sat and stood a number of officers, Captain Norman included, who were whispering in low and earnest tones. On the other side of the railing were half a score of privates and petty grade officers, some belonging to Troop A.

There was a sudden and profound hush as Linn was brought into the room under custody, and every eye was directed to the athletic figure of the young corporal who had so distinguished himself in the recent campaign, and was now to be accused of grave charges—charges of an unexpected and startling nature, as rumor had it.

It was just an hour since Linn's arrest, and that wretched hour he had spent in the dreary guard-house, refusing to taste the supper that was brought him, and trying vainly to find a gleam of hope in the black cloud of disgrace that enveloped him. Now, at last, he was to face the ordeal, and he seemed to have nerved himself for it.

His shoulders were erect, and his arms were folded across his breast. His features, though very pale, wore a proud and half-defiant look. He glanced calmly about

the room, meeting Captain Norman's vindictive gaze for an instant, and observing with surprise that neither Captain Cameron nor Major Dallas were present. He had relied on the latter to stand by him, and he deeply regretted his absence.

"Corporal Osborne, come forward."

The colonel's voice rang clear and stern.

Linn stepped to the colonel's desk, saluted, and stood at attention.

"I am sorry to see you here, Osborne," Colonel Bromley began, "especially since Major Dallas has recommended you for promotion because of your gallant conduct in the late fight. Various charges have been brought against you. The first one is for disobedience of orders, preferred by Captain Norman, your troop commander. This is the sworn accusation."

He read aloud a lengthy document, couched in formal and precise language. The gist of it was, to speak plainly, that Corporal Osborne had willfully disobeyed orders in leading his detachment into the ravine, thereby causing the death of certain men of Troop A, each being specified by name.

"I am not guilty, sir," Linn responded.

"Can you produce any witnesses in your behalf?" the colonel asked.

"I am the only survivor of the detachment," Linn answered. "My witnesses are all dead. If but one of those poor fellows were here he would clear me."

"But you went into the ravine, corporal, and you were ordered not to do so. Do you deny that?"

"No, sir," responded Linn. "I had to do it. Under the circumstances it would have been simple madness for me to obey my orders. Hundreds of Indians were behind us and on both sides. The only chance for us

was to take shelter in the ravine, and I chose that course."

"But why did you permit your detachment to fall into such a trap? You were told to take every precaution as you advanced."

"And so I did, sir; I had patrols on the crest of both ridges. But it was a dark afternoon, and the Sioux were hidden in the scrub. I want to say this, Colonel Bromley, if you will permit me," Linn added, in a more earnest tone: "Had I attempted to hold my ground when we were surprised every man of us would have been killed and scalped in ten minutes. Then, instead of being warned in time by Private Reily, the main column under Major Dallas would have fallen into a similar ambushade and been cut to pieces. My disobedience, as my accuser terms it, undoubtedly saved a great many lives."

"We are not discussing that point," said Captain Norman, in a low tone. "No lives need have been lost had you taken proper precautions in approaching the ravine."

Just then a private of Troop A, who had been listening with keen interest from outside the railing, and probably had a drop too much in him, muttered, in a recklessly loud tone:

"Why don't he call the lad a liar to his face? The corporal an't to blame, and every man in the troop knows it. I heard the order given that day, and I said at the time it was the dumbest"—

"Silence!" interrupted the angry voice of the colonel. "Remove that man instantly, and lock him up in the guard-house."

As the badly frightened trooper was led out of the room, Colonel Bromley looked thoughtfully at his fellow officers.

"I think myself," he said, in a reflective tone, "that it was unwise to send so small a detachment out scouting in a hostile country, and under the command of so young and inexperienced an officer.

"But we are not sitting on that question now, Osborne," he added, facing around; "nor are we to consider what would have happened had you not led your detachment into the ravine. A court-martial must decide whether or not you took the proper precautions against surprise. I will hold you for trial, and forward a report to the post commander. And now we come to——"

There was a sudden interruption as Captain Cameron entered the office by a rear door. His face was thin and haggard, and showed traces of the sufferings he had lately endured. He seated himself a few feet behind the colonel, and alongside of Captain Norman.

"Do you recognize that officer?" demanded Colonel Bromley, as he pointed to Captain Cameron.

"I do, sir," Linn admitted.

He met unflinchingly the cold and unpitying glance of Bruce's father, the man who knew the dark secret of his life.

"Captain Cameron has preferred grave charges against you, Osborne," the colonel went on, "charges which are likely to terminate your promising career in the army, even should you be acquitted on the other complaint. You doubtless know to what I refer. The captain has told me the whole story privately. He accuses you of enlisting by a false name, and when you were under age. He furthermore declares that you ran away from home under a clearly proved charge of theft, and that you persuaded Deerfoot, the son of Flying Thunder, to aid you in the crime. What have you got to say for yourself? Is your real name Hilliard?"

"Yes," replied Linn. "I admit that, colonel, and I also admit that I enlisted under age. But I swear that I am innocent of the robbery——"

"Linn, Linn," why will you persist in this wicked denial?" exclaimed Captain Cameron, starting to his feet. "For your own sake, and for the sake of your father, make a full confession. I am sorry to have brought you to such a pass when you were leading a new life, but it was my imperative duty. Confess, my lad, and I will do what I can for you."

"I have nothing to confess, Captain Cameron," Linn said, angrily, his temper getting the better of him. "Why am I to be hounded again by this false accusation? I can only repeat what I told you before, that it was your own son who——"

"Stop, stop, Linn!" cried the captain. "Oh, this is too much! How dare you try to heap infamy on the dead—on my poor lost boy? Have you no sense of shame or of manhood?"

As the captain paused, breathless with indignation, there was a stir in the front of the room, and Major Dallas pushed his way to the front.

"Pardon this interruption, Colonel Bromley," he exclaimed, "but I was detained at my house, and could not get here sooner. Will you delay the proceedings for a moment, and permit me to have a brief conversation with Captain Cameron?"

"If you insist upon it, yes," replied the colonel. "But be quick."

Major Dallas and the captain retired to an adjoining room, and closed the door. Five minutes dragged slowly by. Colonel Bromley pretended to read a paper, and his fellow officers whispered in low tones. Linn stood erect by the desk, wondering what was to happen next.

Then a thrill of expectation pervaded the room as the door opened and Captain Cameron and Major Dallas appeared. The latter walked over to the accused prisoner, and took his stand beside him in a friendly manner.

Captain Cameron staggered as he came forward, and his face was as white as a sheet.

"I—I have just heard strange news, colonel," he said, incoherently. "I fear it has upset me. I can hardly believe——"

He turned toward the prisoner.

"Linn, is this true?" he added. "Is it true that you and Bruce were prisoners together in Flying Thunder's camp—that you helped him to escape at the risk of your own life—that you saw him slain by the Indians?"

"It is all true, sir."

"Then tell me the story. Let me hear it from your own lips. I—I can bear it."

Not a sound was heard in the room as Linn began the narrative. Modestly, and in clear tones, he told the thrilling story of his adventure in the Sioux camp. When he finished many glances of admiration and sympathy were leveled at him. Captain Cameron covered his face for a moment, and when he took down his hands there were tears in his eyes.

"It was a noble deed," he said. "I cannot understand you, Linn. You have the making of a hero, and yet, you stoop to falsehood and deceit. I appeal to you again to confess——"

"And again I say that I have nothing to confess. I swear that I am innocent. Let this end the matter, Captain Cameron. Bruce is dead, and his lips are sealed forever. But if he were alive and here now he would confess his own guilt and clear my character. At our

last interview, he agreed to do that if he should escape——”

“I cannot believe that,” groaned the captain. “I can’t do it, Linn. My boy could not have been a liar and a thief. You are hardened to crime, and I am convinced that further appeals to you will be useless. But for your own sake, I am sorry—deeply sorry.”

He sank down on a chair and covered his face with his hands.

“This is a painful scene,” said Colonel Bromley—“the most painful in all my experience.”

He tugged thoughtfully at his mustache.

“I agree with you, colonel,” said Major Dallas. “It is exceedingly painful. And that there is some mistake I firmly believe. What I have known and seen of Corporal Osborne satisfies me that he is incapable of falsehood and deceit. I believe in his innocence.”

“Thank you for that, major,” replied Linn, in a low and grateful tone. “In spite of appearances, I am innocent.”

“I would remind Major Dallas, if he will permit me, that I also have seen a great deal of the prisoner,” said Captain Norman. “And from my knowledge of him I can readily believe in his guilt.”

“Gentlemen, your opinions are not called for,” exclaimed Colonel Bromley. “The hearing is at an end, and I hold the accused for trial on all the charges. He shall have every opportunity to prepare a defense. And now let him be taken back to his cell——”

The colonel paused, and put one hand to his ear. There was a stir and bustle in the room, and a noisy shuffling of feet. Some one called for silence, and as the noise among the spectators subsided a faint and distant cheering was heard. All listened intently, and with looks of surprise and wonder. Linn’s eyes were fixed on the

floor. He was on the point of breaking down, and longed for the privacy of the guard-house.

"Bless me! what does this mean?" exclaimed Colonel Bromley. "It is a most disorderly proceeding. It sounds like insubordination and mutiny. It surely can't be a demonstration in favor of the prisoner!"

"Hardly that," replied Major Dallas. "Something of an unusual nature has happened."

The hoarse tumult grew nearer and louder. The tramp of many feet mingled with frantic shouting and cheering. Then the door of the office was burst open, and as those within fell back to right and left, two figures in faded and torn army uniforms advanced through the gap. Had the dead come to life? There were some who thought so, and little wonder, for the new arrivals were instantly recognized as Lieutenant Dimsdale and Bruce Cameron!

Let us draw a veil over the affecting scene that followed. With a cry of joy, Bruce fell into his father's arms, and Lieutenant Dimsdale was nearly pulled to pieces by his well-meaning and delighted friends. Linn realized that he would now be cleared of the charge which he dreaded the most, and the revulsion of feeling was so great that Major Dallas had to assist the lad to a chair.

Bruce quickly came over to him, and with tears in his eyes the captain's son wrung the hand of the friend who had so nobly returned good for evil. Lieutenant Dimsdale greeted him warmly, too, and when some semblance of order was finally restored, Major Dallas found an opportunity of explaining to the new arrivals the distressing situation in which Linn was placed.

Then Bruce did a manly thing, and one that went far to redeem his past conduct. In the presence of all assembled, with a shamed face, but an unfaltering voice,

he told the whole bitter story of his wrong-doing at Carlisle, amply and completely vindicating Linn. A burst of applause filled the room, and after it had subsided, Lieutenant Dimsdale rose to his feet, and drew a folded paper from his pocket.

"Colonel Bromley," he said, "this is a fitting time for me to offer in evidence the document that I hold in my hand. On the morning that Private Reily reached the main column, and in the short time that was permitted, I persuaded him to make a written and sworn statement of the doings of the detachment under Corporal Osborne. I did so because I foresaw what would likely happen. You will admit that I acted wisely, since poor Reily is now dead, and all the other witnesses, and since Corporal Osborne is charged with what I believe to be unjust. Here is the paper, written and signed by Reily, and witnessed by myself. Will you please read it?"

Colonel Bromley did read it, and as it gave a true account of all the doings and adventures of the little detachment, considerable of a sensation was created. Captain Norman, thinking it the best and only way out of the scrape, at once retracted his charges, and then lost no time in slipping out of the room.

Linn was now a target for congratulations. Major Dallas and all the officers shook hands with him; the colonel said some kind and complimentary things, and Captain Cameron, with tears in his eyes, openly asked forgiveness for his unjust suspicions and accusations.

Then curiosity became rife as to how Bruce and the lieutenant had escaped, and they willingly gratified the audience. Briefly, the narratives were as follows: Bruce had escaped the Indian bullets by a quick dive, and when he came to the surface to breathe he was close under the overhanging bank of the river. He concealed

himself in the reeds until the search for him was abandoned, and then he crept from the water and gained the open plain.

He lost his way in the darkness, and wandered about for the greater part of the next day. Then, toward evening, he stumbled upon Lieutenant Dimsdale. The latter had made his escape that morning from a party of Sioux who had taken him a prisoner after the battle at the gorge. For three more days Bruce and the lieutenant tramped toward the fort, keeping a watch for Indians, and unfortunately missing the line of march of the soldiers. Finally they fell in with a party of teamsters, who were persuaded to provide them with horses, and accompany them to the fort.

* * * * *

Linn slept in his own quarters that night, a happier lad than he had been for many a long day. His case was not yet settled, for the fact that he had enlisted by a false name, and when under age, prevented him from getting his promotion and from further service. But Captain Cameron fancied that he saw a way out of that difficulty, and after a conference with the colonel and Major Dallas, he secretly telegraphed to Mr. Hilliard.

Meanwhile, during the days that followed, several things happened. The murderous Sioux had returned to their reservations, and were full of promises to behave better in future. Flying Thunder and some of the leading braves of Gray Fox's tribe surrendered themselves, and were confined in irons. Captain Norman requested to be transferred to some other post, and the matter was so quickly arranged at Washington by telegraph that in three days the commander of Troop A left Fort Sandiman for a post further west, regretted by few, and mourned by none.

Mr. Hilliard arrived the morning after the captain's departure, and the interview between father and son was a very affecting one. Linn freely forgave, and the proofs of his father's sincere affection for him made him a happy lad.

Captain Cameron offered, by way of amends for his unjust treatment, to get Linn an appointment to West Point, and the offer—which promised to realize the lad's highest ambitions—was gladly accepted. Linn and his father immediately returned to Carlisle, where the young soldier received quite an ovation, for the news of his brief and gallant military career had preceded him.

Within a week or two Linn's enlistment was nullified by the War Department, and he settled down to hard study. During the following summer he received the promised appointment, passed the examinations with credit, and was duly entered at the famous institution on the Hudson.

Our young hero is now in his second year at the military school, and it is understood that when he graduates he will be assigned to duty with his old troop at Fort Sandiman, where Lieutenant Dimsdale, and Major Dallas, and the other friends he made in the past, will gladly welcome him back as a full-fledged and gallant officer.

Bruce's misconduct forfeited his chances of a military career, and he is now engaged in business with an uncle who resides in an Eastern city. He seems to have taken a liking to it, and gives promise of becoming a useful and honorable citizen.

Steve Halsey is leading a worthless and idle life, and, unless he reforms, will come to a bad end. He removed and spent the portion of the stolen money which he and Bruce concealed in the neighborhood of

Alexander's Cave, and his father had to make good the amount to Captain Cameron.

Flying Thunder has been released, and is now conducting himself as a good Indian should. Deerfoot lives on the reservation, having stoutly refused to return to Carlisle, and it is the opinion of army officers that he will make a better chief than his father. Doubtless, some time in the future, the young Sioux and Linn Hilliard will renew the friendship which began and ended under such strange and thrilling circumstances.

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Ishmael; or, in the Depths. By Mrs. Emma D. E. N. Southworth	86	Arrow

J

Jack. By Alphonse Daudet.....	59	Arrow
Jack and Three Jills. By F. C. Philips.....	14	Arrow
Jack Archer. By G. A. Henty.....	19	Medal
Jess: A Tale of the Transvaal. By H. Rider Haggard....	83	Arrow
John Needham's Double. By Joseph Hatton.....	41	Magnet
Jud and Joe, Printers and Publishers. By Gilbert Patten..	33	Medal

K

Kidnapped. By Robert Louis Stevenson.....	15	Arrow
King or Knave. By R. E. Francillon.....	7	Arrow
King's Stratagem and Other Stories, The. By Stanley J. Weyman	61	Arrow
King's Talisman, The. By Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.....	21	Columbia
Kit Carey's Protege. By Lieutenant Lionel Lounsberry....	8	Medal
Klondike Claim, A. By Nicholas Carter.....	1	Magnet

L

Lady Audley's Secret. By Miss M. E. Braddon.....	94	Arrow
Lady Evelyn. By May Agnes Fleming.....	141	Eagle
La Tosca. By Victorien Sardou.....	61	Eagle
Lawyer Bell from Boston. By Robert Lee Tyler.....	63	Eagle
Lena Rivers. By Mrs. Mary J. Holmes.....	56	Arrow

Leslie's Loyalty. By Charles Garvice.....	17	Eagle
Lieutenant Carey's Luck. By Lieutenant Lionel Lounsberry	4	Medal
Light That Failed, The. By Rudyard Kipling.....	1	Arrow
Lilian, My Lilian. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.....	106	Eagle
Little Coquette Bonnie. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller....	43	Eagle
Little Cuban Rebel, The. By Edna Winfield.....	68	Eagle
Little Lady Charles. By Effie Adelaide Rowlands.....	139	Eagle
Little Lightning, the Shadow Detective. By Police Captain James.....	70	Magnet
Little Minister, The. By J. M. Barrie.....	96	Eagle
Little Sunshine. By Francis S. Smith.....	10	Eagle
Little Southern Beauty, A. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller..	25	Eagle
Little Widow, The. By Julia Edwards.....	13	Eagle
Living Lie, A. By Paul Bourget.....	8	Arrow
Locksmith of Lyons, The. By Prof. Wm. Henry Peck.....	83	Eagle
Lorrie; or, Hollow Gold. By Charles Garvice.....	85	Eagle
Los Huecos Mystery, The. By Eugene T. Sawyer.....	51	Magnet

M

Macaria. By Augusta J. Evans.....	80	Arrow
Maddoxes, The. By Jean Middlemass.....	38	Arrow
Major Matterson of Kentucky. By the author of Dr. Jack..	58	Eagle
Maltese Cross, The. By Eugene T. Sawyer.....	61	Magnet
Man from India, The. By Nicholas Carter.....	50	Magnet
Man of Mark, A. By Anthony Hope.....	98	Arrow
Man Who Vanished, The. By Nicholas Carter.....	114	Magnet
Man With a Thumb, The. By Barclay North.....	113	Magnet
Marjorie Deane. By Bertha M. Clay.....	79	Eagle
Marquis, The. By Charles Garvice.....	73	Eagle
Marriage at Sea, A. By W. Clark Russell.....	11	Arrow
Masked Detective, The. By Judson R. Taylor.....	82	Magnet
Master of Ballantrae. By Robert Louis Stevenson.....	5	Arrow
Matapan Affair, The. By Fortune DuBoisgobey.....	38	Magnet
Mavourneen. From the celebrated play.....	76	Eagle
Max. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	133	Eagle
Meadowbrook. By Mrs. Mary J. Holmes.....	79	Arrow
Midnight Marriage, The. By A. M. Douglas.....	6	Eagle
Midshipman Merrill. By Lieutenant Lionel Lounsberry....	15	Medal
Mildred Trevanion. By The Duchess.....	40	Arrow
Millionaire Partner, A. By Nicholas Carter.....	59	Magnet
Miss Caprice. By the author of Dr. Jack.....	28	Eagle
Miss Milne and I. By the author of "A Yellow Aster"....	44	Arrow
Miss Pauline of New York. By the author of Dr. Jack....	23	Eagle
Monsieur Bob. By the author of Dr. Jack.....	40	Eagle
Mountaineer Detective, The. By C. W. Cobb.....	40	Magnet
Mr. Lake of Chicago. By Harry DuBois Milman.....	19	Eagle
Mrs. Bob. By the author of Dr. Jack.....	33	Eagle
Muertalma; or, The Poisoned Pin. By Marmaduke Dey...	58	Magnet
My Lady's Money. By Wilkie Collins.....	58	Arrow
Mysterious Case, A. By K. F. Hill.....	32	Magnet
Mysterious Mail Robbery, The. By Nicholas Carter....	13	Magnet
Mystery of a Handsom Cab, The. By Fergus Hume.....	47	Magnet
Mystery of a Madstone, The. By K. F. Hill.....	67	Magnet

N

Nabob of Singapore, The. By the author of Dr. Jack.....	38	Eagle
Nerine's Second Choice. By Adelaide Stirling.....	131	Eagle
New Arabian Nights, The. By Robert Louis Stevenson...	75	Arrow
Nick Carter and the Green Goods Men.....	87	Magnet
Nick Carter's Clever Protege. By Nicholas Carter.....	108	Magnet
Nobody's Daughter. By Clara Augusta.....	127	Eagle
None but the Brave. By Robert Lee Tyler.....	49	Eagle
Northern Lights. By A. D. Hall.....	123	Eagle
North Walk Mystery, The. By Will N. Harben.....	88	Magnet
No. 13 Rue Marlot. By Rene de Pont Jest.....	96	Magnet
Now or Never. By Oliver Optic.....	5	Medal

O

Off with the Old Love. By Mrs. M. V. Victor.....	46	Eagle
Old Detective's Pupil, The. By Nicholas Carter.....	10	Magnet
Old Homestead, The. By Denman Thompson.....	53	Eagle
Old Mortality. By Young Baxter.....	103	Magnet
Old Specie, the Treasury Detective. By Marline Manly..	45	Magnet
On the Firing Line. By Douglas Wells.....	7	Columbia
On the Rack. By Barclay North.....	90	Magnet

P

Partners, The. By Alphonse Daudet.....	67	Arrow
Passenger from Scotland Yard, The. By H. F. Wood..	107	Magnet
Past Master of Crime, A. By Donald J. McKenzie.....	104	Magnet
Peter Simple. By Captain Marryat.....	30	Medal
Phantom Future, The. By Henry Seton Merriman.....	78	Arrow
Phantom 'Rickshaw, The. By Rudyard Kipling.....	12	Arrow
Philippines, The. By A. D. Hall.....	2	Historical
Piano Box Mystery, The. By Nicholas Carter.....	17	Magnet
Plain Tales from the Hills. By Rudyard Kipling.....	63	Arrow
Playing a Bold Game. By Nicholas Carter.....	12	Magnet
Poker King, The. By Marline Manly.....	80	Magnet
Pope (Leo XIII.), A Life of the. By A. D. Hall.....	5	Historical
Porto Rico. By A. D. Hall.....	3	Historical
Post Office Detective, The. By George W. Goode.....	52	Magnet
Prairie Detective, The. By Leander P. Ricardson.....	37	Magnet
Prettiest of All. By Julia Edwards.....	124	Eagle
Pretty Geraldine. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.....	34	Eagle
Price He Paid, The. By E. Werner.....	51	Eagle
Prince of the House of David, The. By Rev. Prof. J. H. Ingraham	43	Arrow
Prisoner of Morro, A. By Ensign Clarke Fitch, U. S. N..	4	Columbia
Prisoners and Captives. By Henry Seton Merriman.....	85	Arrow
Proud Dishonor, A. By Genie Holzmeyer.....	104	Eagle
Puzzle of Five Pistols and Other Stories, The. By Nicholas Carter.....	97	Magnet

Q

Queen Bess. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	1	Eagle
Queen of Treachery, A. By T. W. Hanshew.....	93	Eagle

R

Red Camellia, The. By Fortune Du Boisgobey.....	64	Magnet
Red Lottery Ticket, The. By Fortune DuBoisgobey....	31	Magnet
Revenue Detectives, The. By Police Captain James.....	42	Magnet
Robert Hardy's Seven Days. By Rev. Chas. M. Sheldon..	2	Alliance
Rogue, The. By W. E. Norris.....	9	Arrow
Romance of a Poor Young Man, The. By Octave Feuillet..	46	Arrow
Romance of Two Worlds, A. By Marie Corelli.....	18	Arrow
Rosamond. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.....	57	Eagle
Ruby's Reward. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	2	Eagle
Ruy Blas. By Victor Hugo.....	37	Arrow

S

Sappho. By Alphonse Daudet.....	16	Arrow
Saved by the Enemy. By Ensign Clarke Fitch, U. S. N..	8	Columbia
Saved from the Sea. By Richard Duffy.....	118	Eagle
Scent of the Roses, The. By the author of Half a Truth..	128	Eagle
Sealed Orders; or, The Triple Mystery. By Nicholas Carter	95	Magnet
Secret Service Detail, A. By Douglas Wells.....	5	Columbia
Self-Raised; or, From the Depths. By Mrs. Emma D. E. N. Southworth	87	Arrow
Senator's Bride, The. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.....	20	Eagle
Senator's Favorite, The. Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.....	5	Eagle
Shadowed by a Detective. By Virginia Champlin.....	106	Magnet
Shadow of a Crime, The. Hall Caine.....	84	Arrow

Shenandoah. By J. Perkins Tracy.....	87	Eagle
Sherlock Holmes Detective Stories, The. A. Conan Doyle.....	72	Magnet
She's All the World to Me. By Hall Caine.....	2	Arrow
She Loved Him. By Charles Garvice.....	117	Eagle
Sign of the Crossed Knives, The. By Nicholas Carter.....	79	Magnet
Sign of the Four, The. By A. Conan Doyle.....	17	Arrow
Silver Ship, The. By Leon Lewis.....	18	Medal
Siren's Love, A. By Robert Lee Tyler.....	31	Eagle
Society Detective, The. By Oscar Maitland.....	34	Magnet
Soldier Monk, The. By Ensign Clarke Fitch, U. S. N....	17	Columbia
Soldiers Three. By Rudyard Kipling.....	65	Arrow
Soldier's Pledge, A. By Ensign Clarke Fitch, U. S. N....	12	Columbia
Son of Mars, A. By the author of Dr. Jack.....	108	Eagle
Spain and the Spaniards. By B. Essex Winthrop.....	8	Historical
Span of Life, The. By Sutton Vane.....	103	Eagle
Spider's Web, The. By the author of Dr. Jack.....	71	Eagle
Squire John. By the author of Dr. Jack.....	134	Eagle
Steel Necklace, The. By Fortune DuBoisgobey.....	27	Magnet
Stella Stirling. By Julia Edwards.....	62	Eagle
Stolen Identity, A. By Nicholas Carter.....	9	Magnet
Stolen Pay Train and Other Stories, The. By Nicholas Carter	101	Magnet
Stolen Race Horse and Other Stories, The. By Nicholas Carter	111	Magnet
Story of an African Farm, The. By Olive Schreiner.....	91	Arrow
Strangers of Paris; or, The Grip of Iron, The. (From the Celebrated Play).....	28	Arrow
Study in Scarlet, A. By A. Conan Doyle.....	3	Arrow
Suspense. By Henry Seton Merriman.....	88	Arrow
Sweet Violet. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.....	91	Eagle
Swordsman of Warsaw, The. By Judson R. Taylor....	20	Columbia

T

Tempest and Sunshine. By Mary J. Holmes.....	53	Arrow
That Dowdy. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	44	Eagle
That Girl of Johnsons'. By Jean Kate Ludlum.....	140	Eagle
Thelma. By Marie Corelli.....	55	Arrow
Theodora. By Victorien Sardou.....	29	Eagle
Three Musketeers, The. By Alexander Dumas.....	77	Arrow
Thrice Wedded. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	55	Eagle
Through the Fray. By G. A. Henty.....	25	Medal
Tina. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	77	Eagle
Titled Counterfeiter, A. By Nicholas Carter.....	3	Magnet
Toilers of the Sea, The. By Victor Hugo.....	30	Arrow
Tom and Jerry, The Double Detectives. By Judson R. Taylor	98	Magnet
Tracked Across the Atlantic. By Nicholas Carter.....	4	Magnet
Tragedy in the Rue de la Paix, The. By Adolphe Belot....	32	Arrow
Treasure Island. By Robert Louis Stevenson.....	24	Arrow
True to the Old Flag. By G. A. Henty.....	29	Medal
Try Again. By Oliver Optic.....	9	Medal
Twenty Years After. By Alexander Dumas.....	99	Arrow
Twin Detectives, The. By K. F. Hill.....	74	Magnet
Twixt Love and Hate. By Bertha M. Clay.....	95	Eagle
Two Keys. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	7	Eagle
Two Plus Two. By Nicholas Carter.....	73	Magnet

U

Uncle Sam's Ships. A History of our Navy. By A. D. Hall	6	Historical
Under Fire. By T. P. James.....	75	Eagle
Under His Thumb. By Donald J. McKenzie.....	28	Magnet
Under the Deodars and Story of the Gadsbys. By Rudyard Kipling	70	Arrow
Unseen Bridegroom, The. By May Agnes Fleming.....	136	Eagle
Up the Ladder. By Lieutenant Murray.....	13	Medal

V

Van Alstine Case, The. By Nicholas Carter.....	77	Magnet
Van, the Government Detective. By Judson R. Taylor....	92	Magnet
Vendetta. By Marie Corelli.....	36	Arrow
Verdant Green, Mr., The Adventures of. By Cuthbert		
Bede, B. A.	34	Medal
Vestibule Limited Mystery, The. By Marline Manly....	57	Magnet
Victoria, Queen and Empress. By A. D. Hall.....	9	Historical
Violet Lisle. By Bertha M. Clay.....	14	Eagle
Virgie's Inheritance. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	88	Eagle
Virginia Heiress, The. By May Agnes Fleming.....	9	Eagle
Vivier, of Vivier, Longmans & Co., Bankers. By Barclay		
North	94	Magnet

W

Wall Street Haul, A. By Nicholas Carter.....	6	Magnet
Wanted by Two Clients. By Nicholas Carter.....	81	Magnet
War Reporter, The. By Warren Edwards.....	97	Eagle
Wasted Love, A. By Charles Garvice.....	24	Eagle
Wedded for an Hour. By Emma Garrison Jones.....	81	Eagle
Wedded Widow, A. By T. W. Hanshew.....	137	Eagle
Wheeling for Fortune. By James Otis.....	20	Medal
When London Sleeps. From the Celebrated Play.....		
By Chas. Darrell.....	105	Eagle
White Company, The. By A. Conan Doyle.....	81	Arrow
White King of Africa, The. By William Murray Graydon..	16	Medal
White Squadron, The. By T. C. Harbaugh.....	120	Eagle
Whose Was the Crime? By Gertrude Warden.....	132	Eagle
Whose Wife Is She? By Annie Lisle.....	110	Eagle
Widowed Bride, A. By Lucy Randall Comfort.....	86	Eagle
Widow Lerouge, The. By Emile Gaboriau.....	15	Magnet
Wilful Winnie. By Harriet Sherburne.....	72	Eagle
Witch Hazel. By Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.....	66	Eagle
Wolves of the Navy. By Ensign Clarke Fitch, U. S. N..	13	Columbia
Woman Against Woman. By Effie Adelaide Rowlands.....	52	Eagle
Woman's Hand, A. By Nicholas Carter.....	16	Magnet
Won at West Point. By Lieutenant Lionel Lounsbury..	21	Medal
Won by the Sword. By J. Perkins Tracy.....	65	Eagle
Won by Waiting. By Edna Lyall.....	45	Arrow
Workingman Detective, The. By Donald J. McKenzie...	110	Magnet
Wormwood. By Marie Corelli.....	47	Arrow
Worth Winning. By Mrs. Emily Lovett Cameron.....	52	Arrow
Wreck of the South Pole, The. By Charles Curtz Hahn..	22	Columbia

Y

Yale Man, A. By Robert Lee Tyler.....	45	Eagle
Yankee Champion, The. By Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.....	78	Eagle
Yankee Lieutenant, The. By Douglass Wells.....	1	Columbia
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